

THE
LAWYERS IN LOVE,
&c. &c.

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THE
LAWYERS IN LOVE;
OR,
PASSAGES FROM THE LIFE
OF
A CHANCERY BARRISTER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

‘CAVENDISH,’ “THE PORT ADMIRAL,” “WILL WATCH,”

&c. &c. &c.

“Love’s a soldier!”—“No, he’s not.”
“Love’s a sailor!”—“No such lot.”
“Love’s a doctor!”—“I deny it.”
“Love’s a parson!”—“Go and try it.”
“S’ith, then, Love be none of these,
Sits Love in the Common Pleas?”
“Love’s a jury in himself,—
Love’s a pris’ner ta’en by pelf;
Love alone will never spurn ye,
If ye make him your attorney;
While in love alone, we see
The advocate without a fee!”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE LAWYERS IN LOVE,

CHAPTER I.

“ So shalt thou be despised, fair maid,
When all thy virgin springs grow dry,
And in thy tears alone be brightness found.”

CAREW.

OF all mental tortures in this world, the most painful state of mind which it is possible almost to endure, is one of suspense. Man has naturally been endowed, by nature, with such an elasticity of spirits, that, although the most dreadful lot should befall him, he is still able, in “some part of his soul, to find a drop of patience,” when once he knows the direction in which he has to meet calamity, and what are the ut-

most bounds to which it can extend. But the spirit, perpetually on the rack to discover the extent of its sorrow, endures, over and over again, with every passing moment, those deep and most bitter pangs of agony which attack the strongest minds, when the first suspicion breaks upon them of some new misfortune.

So, in a milder form, Lord George having fully made up his mind to abandon all idea of the heiress, and to marry the long-sought vision of his early love, forgot, in the height of his ecstasy, even the annoyances of his late *exposé*; and, descending to breakfast with a light heart, bore unmoved the downcast and half-bashful looks of the two ladies, who seemed hardly to know how to go through the usual compliments, and enquires as to how he had passed the night.

As the day wore on, Circumspect, who seemed still fully convinced that his Lordship entertained the strongest intentions to-

wards herself, kept, with the utmost anxiety, a perpetual recognizance upon the park avenue, to see when her brother should arrive, in order that she might have confirmed from his lips all the circumstances of the how—where—when, &c., &c., of his having become acquainted with Lord George, and various other matters therewith connected. However, this species of anxiety naturally drew her considerably from his Lordship's presence.

The gallant officer, with singular infidelity, no sooner witnessed the departure of his antique love, than he began to press his suit, more strongly than ever, upon his youthful one, who, as yet, knew not, poor, artless, little soul, that her aunt entertained the slightest notion of the absurd kind which she was guilty of nursing. Unfortunately, however, his Lordship was no sooner engaged in an interesting *tête-à-tête* with Florence, than in popped Circumspect, and, as a matter of course, the

ardent adorer had immediately to change the face of his position, and make a fresh attack. Once or twice, this struck Florence, as being somewhat odd, and several of her aunt's allusions on the previous evening had been of the mystifying nature ; till, at last, Lord George, tired of the perpetual *qui vive* thus required of him, began to think of some *ruse de guerre* for getting rid of this annoyance. After considering, for a few minutes, he, at length, turned suddenly round, with the abrupt question—

“ At what hour have you ordered the horses ? ”

“ What ! my Lord, do you want the carriage ? ”

“ Oh ! no,” said his Lordship ; “ I don't want the carriage at all. I mean the saddle-horses.”

“ The saddle-horses, my Lord ! I haven't understood your Lordship, that you wished to ride.”

“ Ride ! my dearest Miss Circumspect,

not only must I ride, but you must ride also. Do you know, that, for some months past, I have been labouring under a complaint in the chest, for which my physician orders that I must take horse exercise every day, combined with that moral medicine—the society of some agreeable companion. Therefore, you see the case is clear, my dear Miss Circumspect, not only must I go out myself, directly after luncheon, but you must evidently give me the pleasure of your society.”

On hearing this, the fair Circumspect expressed her great grief—first, at hearing that his Lordship was suffering from any indisposition of any kind whatever—and, next, that, from not having used her riding-habit for the last ten years herself, she was afraid it had so shrunk, that she could not possibly get it on. In other words, as Lord George understood the fact, that she had grown so tremendously fat, and the habiliment had waxed so frail, that these

two opposing facts rendered any reconciliation between them impossible. After expressing, both by word, look, and manner, the utmost distress at the intelligence, his Lordship, in the most disappointed manner imaginable, turned to Florence, saying—

“ I suppose you hav’nt such a thing as a riding habit, have you ?”

“ Yes,” said Florence diffidently, “ I have a habit it is true, but I am sure I shall be able to offer but a very poor apology for the society of my Aunt.”

“ Well but,” replied Lord George, in the most ungallant manner possible, “ what am I to do—my physician says it’s no sort of use my taking a ride by myself, and, therefore, under these circumstances I must do the best I can to perfect you in the *equi* conversational department.”

“ Well, but it is so warm for a ride to-day,” said Florence, in such a pouting manner, that Circumspect, who never was so happy as when in the act of contradic-

tion, fell at once into the snare, remarking—

“ Pooh, child, pooh—young ladies like you, not yet out, should only think it too great an honour to take up the position of established womanhood.”

“ That’s right, dear Miss Circumspect, do order her to go and dress—the day I am sure is not too warm for horseback—indeed it is exceedingly cold when the sun goes in ; do make her go.” Thus required, my Aunt, who had almost as soon have ordered Florence to her coffin, was compelled to put on the gracious, and with many ‘ dears’ and pattings of the neck, &c. &c. &c. dispatched Florence to her room to get ready, only too happy to have gained permission for a ride under the semblance of a command. No sooner had Florence’s back been turned than that perfidious ‘ humbug,’ as Mr. Pickwick would have called him—Lord George, raised to his lips the hand of Circumpect, and hung over it with

all the fond enthusiasm of a real *bona fide* swain. Alas, poor Circumspect! how often during the progress of your triumphant career of heiresship and beauty, have you vowed and sworn that no man should take you in, under any or whatever circumstance—how often have you sworn that no mercenary swain should ever possess art sufficient to blind your matchless eyes? Yet now, even now behold yourself, when your folly has reached such a climax as to overstand your time—look in that glass before which you are attitudinizing with the fond belief that you are doing the graceful and youthful thing—look at that wicked dog, who is whispering all sorts of nonsense in your ears, and vowing your fingers are equal to Madame De Brinvilliers', at the very instant he is declaring you in his inmost soul to be the greatest and the oldest fool of his acquaintance. Even now, at this moment, you are persuading yourself not only that he is a true and honest worshipper of

your charms, but that money has no share in the idolatry. Alas! alas! that you should ever be silly enough to think such a thing possible, when not even that boasted wealth for which in your time you have rejected the alliance of so many really true hearts, not even that wealth is powerful enough now to tempt him to become more than your sham suitor! In a few minutes after the permission, or rather command of Circumspect was given, Florence came down dressed in her riding habit, looking, if possible, lovelier than ever. Lord George scarcely daring to let his eyes wander in that direction, for fear his tell-tale glances should betray to the lynx-eyed Circumspect the real state of the case. My Aunt could not help sighing from a different cause, nearly as deeply as his Lordship when the vision of young Florence, equipped for the field, presented itself before her, and she now hastened out, as she said, to order the horses, but as the other two shrewdly sus-

pected, to give some especial instructions for their benefit in that behoof. Accordingly, when the horses came round to the door, they were led by a groom with his coat strapped round his middle with as much precision as if old Bangalore himself had been going to take the air."

"What!" said Lord George, "ride with a groom in the country--what a dreadfully muffish thing!"

"Why, my dear Lord," said Circumspect, "it would be but poor hospitality to your Lordship, suffering from a complaint of the chest, not to send out some one with a coat for you in case it should rain."

"Rain!" replied the sailor, "devil take the rain--the eminent physician to whom I was referring a little while back, thinks there is nothing like the rain for patients with my malady, and, in fact, you know it's the new doctrine just come into fashion."

"No, no, indeed, my Lord, I should never forgive myself if I were to send you

out without a groom." A speech which his Lordship readily conceived had more meanings than one ; but, fearful of exciting the excellent woman's suspicions, by making any further opposition, he allowed the subject at once to drop, and vaulting into the saddle as soon as he had lifted Florence into her's, the party set off.

CHAPTER II.

“ Yes, Madam, the Count himself will make the offer.”

Ld. SAGE.

THE first question Lord George now asked was of Florence, and went to demand in Italian whether the groom in the coat was not in the secret service of my Aunt, and the answer being directly confirmatory of this view, the lovers determined to try and give the jockey the slip. Accordingly all paces they went, now fast, now slow, now pursuing one vagary and now another, over meadow, glade, and forest, but all in vain. Master Groom, like a perfect weird horseman, was perpetually a few yards behind them. Out of hearing distance, it is

true, he had the decency to keep, and much as his Lordship sighed amid those sunny dells and bosky dingles for a few moments *tête-à-tête*, the luxury was denied him. At first, as might naturally be expected, he was exceedingly wroth with the fellow, and could scarcely refrain from turning round and ordering him to keep at a greater distance, but as he was aware this must have been reported, and have confirmed all those suspicions which Aunt Circumspect began to think not unnatural, his Lordship forbore to adopt so dangerous an expedient. For the same reason also, and with equal good policy, he refrained from having recourse to anything like a bribe, and at last finding he had nothing for it, but to put up with the nuisance, he and Florence pursued their ride under mitigated circumstances of enjoyment, each perhaps more warmly drawn to the other from this first hindrance thrown in their path, and Lord George especially resolved to pay off old Mother Circumspect

as he termed her, to the utmost extent in his power, which, as it happened, was a very considerable extent, thanks to her own folly. However it was not till the hour of dinner had nearly arrived, and the lovers had plotted a meeting in the garden after the supposed period of retiring to rest—a very wrong, but a very delightful proceeding—that the horses' heads were turned homewards, and the agitations of Circumspect brought to a temporary conclusion. Both the equestrians had been prepared, with some degree of nervousness, to hear of the arrival of Sir Simper; but, to their surprise on going home, that worthy man had not yet presented himself. What could be the meaning of this they neither knew nor cared, Lord George hoped he was hung, and though Florence did not commit herself by any such decisive aspirations, she by no means desired his return one moment earlier than might suit his entire convenience.

During dinner, Circumspect expressed her surprise that the worthy Indian should not have returned ; and, while pondering over the question, of when Lord George would make his proposal, arrived at the conclusion, upon grounds, it is presumed, better known to her than to us, that this event would take place on the moment of her brother's return. This evening passed off in much the same manner the preceding had done, with the exception, that Lord George was more careful as to his cups, and withdrew at a much earlier hour ; and, though in an infinitely more joyous, yet not in so glorious a condition as on the preceding evening ; when, certainly, he had loved the wine-cup, not wisely, but too well.

During the ride, Lord George, by one or two hints, had somewhat opened Florence's eyes as to the game he was playing on her aunt's tender affections. And, if Florence did not, at the time, express all the horror she ought perhaps to have felt

at his hypocrisy, it must be urged, in mitigation, that her youth made her regard, rather as a joke than any thing else, the tampering with her aunt's regards, which he had so very unhesitatingly put into play. Accordingly, thus prepared, it excited infinitely less surprise than amusement in the mind of Florence, when Circumspect, having made her usual nightly visit to her room, while Florence prepared, as her aunt thought, for final repose, after the fatigues of the day, Circumspect opened to her, with great circumlocution, and still greater mystery, her conviction as to the approaching change in her life. Poor Florence had been so mewed up that she was still a novice in these matters; she had therefore great difficulty in restraining her countenance—and some scruple of conscience, as to whether she ought to allow her aunt to go on thus deceiving herself. But, luckily for her own happiness, both her scruples and conscience were at last over-

come. And Florence having received a promise that she should certainly be bridesmaid, she ventured to add—

“If his Lordship should propose?”

“*If*, my dear!” said my aunt. “Why, after his unequivocal attentions, is it possible that you think there can be any doubt on the subject?”

“Why, my dear aunt,” said Florence hastening to appease her offended relative, “after what I have heard from you, who are much better able to judge of these matters than myself, I, of course, can offer no opinion, raw and inexperienced girl as I am; only, having always heard how dreadfully deceitful men are, that was my reason for throwing in the doubt to which you allude.”

“Why, yes, my dear girl, men are, as you say, excessively deceitful; and you cannot do better than remain as much on your guard against them as you are now. But for me, who have had a long experience in affairs of the heart, and who—perhaps,

though I ought not to say it in pity to the poor young men—have, in my time, refused *no end of offers—for me, it is almost unnecessary to say, it is impossible to deceive my long experience, and, I may well add, my instinctive insight into character. I knew, from the first quarter of an hour I passed in the delightful society of his Lordship, that our fates were united.*”

“Charming thing!” said the quiet, wicked, little Florence. “What a charming thing it must be to detect at sight those who love you from those who do not!”

“Oh! indeed it is!” rejoined Circumspect. “I may say, it’s a gift I have enjoyed from childhood. I have exercised it on every occasion, and never yet found myself deceived in the unerring insight it gives its possessors into the true character of those who address them. Now, his Lordship, I can perceive as plainly as possible, is only waiting for the return of my brother, to make his proposal. And I think, if my

brother does not return to-morrow, that he will wisely wave any little punctilio that he may feel on that score. But, as soon as ever it happens, my dear, you may be sure I will let you know. You shall be the first to congratulate me. And now, my darling, good night."

CHAPTER III.

“ 'Tis past ! Her lover's at her feet.”

PARISINA.

FLORENCE listened with great attention to the retreating footsteps of her experienced relative, as the latter proceeded to her own room, and then said, with a sigh, as she heard the footfall gradually die away—

“ Alas ! he must be deceiving one of us ! And either you or I ; my dear Circumspect, must become the victim ; and, perhaps, a still harder part than any, is the necessity, that one of us should be under, of playing false to the other. However, if it must be so, I suppose we must bow to our fate ; for,

as yet, he seems to have made equal protestations of love to both of us, but an actual offer to neither. At any rate, I will keep the appointment I have been foolish enough to make for the evening, and see if he takes the opportunity of declaring himself. By what strange powers are we led through life! and how little did I imagine, when I first saw the carriage so nearly run over him in Albemarle-street, and marvelled at the extraordinary apathy with which he seemed to be looking at us, that destiny was then tying the link which was to attach me to the first man who ever raised that emotion which colours woman's whole dream, and life, and study—love.”

By the time this soliloquy was ended, Florence having rapidly completed her toilet, seated herself at the French window, opening, by a jasmine-covered flight of steps, to the lawn below, on which Lord George was to make his appearance in the bright moonlight, and signalize his lady-

love, by imitating the song of the nightingale, to come down and listen to his amorous descant. One by one, the sounds of life and habitation in the house gradually died off, and, some ten minutes after the last of these fell into the silence of the night, there might have been heard just the least possible creak of his Lordship's door, and soon, to all but the most practised ear, the long, liquid note of night's most tuneful bird, came upon the ears of the listening Florence. How wildly did her heart beat at that moment! Let us remember, this was not only the first appointment she had ever been silly enough to make; but this was also the first time passion had ever pleaded in that young heart with the only species of eloquence that can truly be called resistless. Like all the rest of us, she had greatly doubted the wisdom of yielding, and then, almost in the same breath, had given way; and now, when the actual moment arrived, felt so excited and nervous, she

could scarcely unclasp the fastenings of the window, that alone stood in the path between herself and him whom she most ardently desired, yet feared to meet, in all the delicious enjoyment of unrestrained intercourse and uninterrupted privacy. While her trembling fingers were busy with the spring-latch, the figure of Lord George emerged from a thicket of arbutus, and, in another instant, Florence was passionately clasped to the heart of her lover."

"A thousand thanks, a thousand times," whispered the youth, as soon as he could bring himself to interrupt that silence so infinitely more expressive than any language—"a thousand thanks for your kindness in granting this interview! I thought this hour would never arrive, and, for the first time in my life, feared death, lest it should come to snatch me from this enjoyment."

"Ah, my Lord," murmured Florence, not daring to lift up the long lashes of her

dark blue eyes ; I fear you must condemn me, for being so easily induced to grant a meeting, which my own conscience tells me ought neither to be so agreeable, nor, indeed, to have been ever given ; if I had not thought it, perhaps, worse to break my promise than to come, I think, even at the last, I should have stayed away."

" Nay, dearest, do not say that ; and as to my blaming you, even in thought, I vow you offer me a cruel wrong, in supposing it possible ; indeed, what else is left us ? In the house, every movement is so vigilantly watched, by that jealous piece of antiquity Aunt Circumspect, that she reminds me of an old Dutch clock ; which, though it has no sense for a minute's enjoyment itself, yet you can swear has measured each moment of rapture around it for generations. It is only in meetings like these, that I possess happiness in your society without alloy."

" Ah, my Lord, and this is the very time,

when, on my part, the enjoyment of our intercourse is most accompanied by self-reproach."

"Nay, nay, my dearest Florence, do not say so; even the mere hearing that you are afflicted with such a feeling, makes me wretched."

"And forms my only excuse; and when on some future day, you laugh at my girlish confidence in trusting your professions of love, be pleased to remember, that I more than half doubted, even amid the folly of permitting them."

"On the contrary, Florence, I entreat and implore you, to have a better opinion of my truth; here, take my arm, we will stroll down to the tranquil banks of the river, at the bottom of the Park. There is a beautiful little waterfall, that, by moonlight, will look perfectly enchanting; and, as we wander on, in order to convince you how much I merit what I ask, I will at

once confide to you the thoughts which, ever since we first met, have been distracting my mind on your account."

"On my account,—is it possible?"

"Nay, more, it is positive; I confess, mercenary as you will think the object,—I came down here, at my friend Pierrepont's suggestion, to run off with his cousin, your friend Acantha; who, as you know, is a rich heiress, and his aversion. But the snare I had laid for others, I have deservedly fallen into myself."

"How? in what way, my Lord?"

"Unfortunately, before I could perpetrate my scheme, I had seen one, the beauties of whose mind and person, convinced me there is a wealth, even more desirable than that of Peru. Life will be poor indeed to me without it; and now, I ask your intercession, to procure a favourable termination to my hopes."

"How is it possible, my Lord, I can be of use in such a delicate affair?" agitatedly

enquired the trembling Florence—stung to the quick.

“Most easily.—It is true, I have but little to offer, I am a poor man; but the seeds of ambition, never bring forth golden fruit so rapidly, as when sown by affection, and ripened by the breath of love.”

“My Lord.”

“Hear me to an end; I will not detain you long; the passion of which I speak—rapid of growth as it may seem, has effected as sudden a revolution in my heart, as in my mind; and if”—taking the hand of Florence, and placing it upon his heart—“you will entreat the owner of this little treasure to bestow it here, she may believe, upon the honour and truth of a gentleman, that the services of my life, shall be devoted to the care of both interest and principal. You do not speak,” continued Lord George, pressing her towards him, as Florence made no reply to the sentiments he had just expressed. “You do

not answer me! Have I—can I have been so unfortunate as to offend you—are you displeased—do you reject me? if so, say but one word, a sound shall be enough, and I will relieve you from the presence that disturbs your comfort, infinitely less than your's has wrecked, or made my happiness.

“ My Lord,” whispered Florence, but in a tone so agitated, that her words were scarcely audible; “ your communication has been so sudden—so unexpected, it finds me so unprepared—our knowledge—our intimacy so brief, that though we have known one another by sight, for a period that amounts to years, yet, would you not think me imprudent, if, after so little opportunity of our knowing one another's real character—” here Florence came to a dead pause; while there rose before her, as if to upbraid her, or at least to point out her imprudence, the circumstances which, even by Lord George's own admission, made so strongly against him. “ What had he stated

himself to be?—a professed fortune hunter ; can it then be possible, that, notwithstanding the explanation he has given me of our rapid, I might add, blameably precipitate intimacy ; notwithstanding the fact, of my having cherished his image ever since the singular accident to which he has alluded ; suppose he should have heard, that I too, am, like Acantha, a victim garlanded for the sacrifice ?” Then, at this point, arose a consideration—how to resolve her doubts how it could be possible to test his sincerity, and while thus torn with conflicting emotions, Lord George pressing and imploring a reply, Florence continued in that hesitating gentle sort of timid whisper, that had marked the whole tone of her conversation up to this point, as if she were afraid almost to hear herself breathe. “ My Lord, I confess myself taken by surprise, still less did I dream when you began the conversation, that it had any reference to me.”

“ Why, my dear Florence,” answered

Lord George, “to whom else could it refer? Is it usual, my own sweet novice, to ask the hand of one beautiful woman, through the lips of another. But, tell me, do you reject me ; can you not find one little monosyllable? Then, in your silence, I must discover that consent, you have not the generosity, or, may I dare to say, the resolution to utter. Now, tell me, have you courage to trust yourself as far as Gretna Green ?”

CHAPTER IV.

“ See, the mountains kiss high heaven,
And the waves clasp one another;
No sister flower would be forgiven,
If it disdain'd its brother;
And the sunlight clasps the earth,
And the moonbeams kiss the sea.
What are all these kissings worth,
If thou kiss not me?”—SHELLEY.

“ WHY,” said Florence, at length, summoning her courage, when she found matters assuming such a run away pace, on so desperate a point, “before I reply to that question, you will be pleased to answer a few of mine.”

“ A thousand, if you will, my own Florence, so, now proceed in your most sweet catechism ; and fear not that every word I reply to you, shall be the strictest truth.”

“ Of that, at least, I am confident,” said Florence ; “ and now, first let me ask you

whether, on the honour of a gentleman, you have summoned courage enough to marry a penniless girl like myself, for the mere sake of—”

“ Yourself? Then, on the honour of a gentleman, I have.”

“ And, are you in truth aware, that all the fortune I possess in the world, is three hundred a year on my coming of age; and even that is locked up in Chancery, till my minority terminates.”

“ Nay, my dear Florence, I never even knew that ’till this moment. Your Aunt casually said something, while you were absent, putting on your riding habit, about your poverty, it is true; and then named a far less sum than you have now mentioned.”

“ Then, now, let me see you fix your eyes on mine, while you repeat your vows. Man’s signature may, I admit, be feigned, or forged at will, but the handwriting of his Maker, is neither to be mistaken, nor misread.”

“I swear I love you Florence, if possible, more firmly now than I even did before. Will that satisfy you?”

“Yes, I think I can trust that countenance; and that was the first impression it ever gave me, or—I should, perhaps, add unfortunately, to say the least of it—I should not now be walking with a young gentleman, at this hour, to see a waterfall by moon-light. Tell me, dearest George, will you never, in any future day, reproach me for this egregious folly?”

“Yes, love, I will, a thousand times a day;” replied his Lordship, “don’t you know how?”

“Know how?”

“Thus, dearest, and thus,” and his Lordship tenderly passed his arm round Florence’s waist and imprinted a succession of passionate kisses on that matchless face. Perhaps it might be contended that Florence, on this decided step of his Lordship, ought to have taken offence. On the other

hand, however, it may be conceived she did a much wiser thing in following the dictates of Nature, which left her so much ashamed, that she could not utter a word, while his Lordship, thankful to have escaped a reprimand, continued—

“ I am very glad you have faith in countenances, for it is a doctrine some of my warmest friends have always vigorously supported—believe me, then, I shall never be one whose conduct shall be said to throw discredit on the doctrine of his own school—and that we are right in our theory, I cannot but think, for it is one that Nature universally teaches and upholds.”

“ And Nature, unlike most friends, rarely or ever spreads a snare in the path of those she loves.”

“ By Heaven you are right, and what the vulgar call love at sight, is but a bill payable at presentation which was drawn long before.”

“ Your treatment of the passion, my

Lord, is inimitable—no one could surpass you, save a poetical banker's clerk, one of those, no doubt described by Mr. Pope—

‘ Foredoomed his father’s soul to cross,
Who pens a stanza when he should engross. ’ ”

“ A banker’s clerk of a lover, you little quiz—then you must excuse me for taking discount—and as for the hand, whether it contains three hundred or three thousand, or three units, that is a fact which will never render it less dear to its new possessor.”

“ Fie! Fie! my Lord,” cried Florence, half laughing, half trembling, struggling to get free from her lover’s arms, “ I declare you are quite a usurer with your discount, and instead of being content with two, three, or at most six per cent for your promissory notes, you have exacted at least a hundred.”

“ And booked you for a thousand more, dear Florence.”

“ Well, well, Sir, not to-night—you have already made me a bankrupt, and if you try

to extort any more ready-money payments, I declare you will make me run away. As for the rest, I confess, your vows bear yet an embryo bloom upon them. But now for their first test, and if, my Lord, you can devise any scheme to free me from the horrors of this prison, I may take into consideration the journey you mention."

"Oh! as to freeing you, nothing is so easy, if you will but give your consent—but why is this residence so hateful?"

"You might just as well ask Sir Simper why he wishes to have the controul of my property, inconsiderable as it is."

"The sordid old rascal—what should prevent our flying from him at once?"

"You forget I am one of those miserably over-protected beings, a minor and ward in Chancery. This has always been held out *in terrorem* to me, as certain to plunge my husband into a thousand difficulties. Tomorrow, however, there is a grand ball at Carlisle—if you could but persuade my

Aunt to take me to it, I have friends there who might assist us."

"Why, true; that plan seems likely."

"But how will you be able to win over my Aunt?"

"In the same way that I have thrown dust in the worthy Jezebel's eyes already, by making love to her; but you must promise not to be jealous."

"Jealous! Jealous! of a maiden aunt of fifty-four—nay, truly, that is rather too good a farce. If we never quarrel till your making love to Aunt Circumspect is the cause of our disagreement, I think we may get on very well."

"Well, then, trust me, her consent is as good as gained. What's her weak point? by all accounts she is as impregnable as Gibraltar, though the valour of British arms succeeded in taking even Gibraltar."

"Yes, and in keeping it too."

"Nay, nay, excuse me from that; but has she no weak point—no little predilection?"

“None that I know, unless it is Port-wine-negus.”

“Port-wine-negus, I would not wish a better ally; brandy-and-water will beat that at any time, so the day’s my own.”

“Well, take care of your head, my Lord, for she is a perfect mistress of her weapon, and pray don’t propose champagne, for the other evening you seemed not to be very lucky in the management of that sparkling flask.”

Lord George felt the colour rise to his cheeks, as his mistress uttered these words, the first allusion he had yet heard to his unfortunate potations on the night of his arrival.

“Ah! sly satirist!” replied his Lordship, and he attempted to punish his young mistress for her raillery, but her step was too light for him to follow with success, and, slipping from his side, she rapidly bounded away until, in spite of all his entreaties, Lord George beheld her swiftly

glide up the steps that led to her own room, when she waved him a brief adieu, and then vanished inside. The charm of the night, of course, departed with the young being who had left him ; and after gazing at her window for some time, in the hope that she might be induced to return, he at length slowly sought his own chamber to renew, in the dreams of sleep, the pleasure of that interview, the reality of which had flown from him for ever! One of those rapid passages of ecstasy in life, for which Fate makes us poor mortals pay so heavily during the greater portion of our existence.

CHAPTER V.

“Sing no more ditties, sing no mo
Of dumps so dull and heavy,
The fraud of men was ever so,
Since summer first was leavy.”

SHAKSPEARE.

THE following day found Lord George entering once more the house of his sister-in-law, Lady Sidney. Now that all his plans had become changed with regard to his intentions for the future, it was of course idle for him any longer to risk seeing Sir Simper until he had determined what steps to take respecting Florence, for, as Acantha was no longer an object of interest to him, his original notion of taking a letter to the learned Baronet was wholly changed, and instead of desiring an interview, he only considered himself exceed-

ingly lucky that some circumstance or other, with which he was not acquainted, had prevented Sir Simper from reaching home. Taking advantage of this fact, to frame some excuse to Circumspect for a temporary absence, and promising to be sure and meet them at the Carlisle Ball, to which, according to his promise, he had obtained permission for Florence to go, under care of her Aunt, he now set out to consult his great adviser in all love matters, Lady Sydney, as to what would be the best steps to pursue under the altered aspects of the case. On hearing what had befallen George, Lady Sydney's first assistance was a hearty laugh at the wonderful alteration her relative's views had undergone, and professing herself unable alone to advise him how to act, rang to summon Miss Curtis, who, she said, was still staying with her, and was a great ally of his young betrothed.

“ Oh, then,” said Lord George, “ undoubtedly you are the friends to whom Flo-

rence alluded, when she said you might be able to help her at the Carlisle Ball."

"Very probably so—perhaps we were—for if it should be in our power, nothing I know would delight Miss Curtis more than to be of use to your fair enslaver; however, we will hear what she says."

The bell having been accordingly rung, and Miss Curtis summoned, she at length made her appearance very elegantly dressed, and leading, in that absurd manner to which single ladies occasionally have recourse, a beautiful little spaniel of the Blenheim breed by a long silken sash.

"Now, Miss Curtis," said Lady Sydney, as the other thus entered, "if you are not too deeply engaged with your lap dog, will you spare a few moments to his Lordship?"

"Why, truly," said the despotic beauty, "it is a nice question, as I have no doubt his Lordship will admit, which is the most deserving puppy of the two; and pray, may I ask, as we are upon this point, is his dis-

interested Lordship in a dilemma? or, perhaps, he hardly knows how to choose between *the fortune of Miss Acantha* and the beauty of our Aunt Circumspect."

"Miss Acantha!" said Lord George, "a pretty wild-goose chase it would have been if I had thought any thing more of her. When I got to Grove Park, the only thing I heard of Miss Acantha was that she had, a day or two before, quitted her guardian's house to pay a short visit to Carlisle."

"Indeed! to Carlisle!" exclaimed both ladies in one voice. "Why," said Lady Sidney, "with whom can she be staying?"

"Ha! by Jove, that's more than I know. I didn't like to ask, because, for one thing, it might have seemed as if I had some motive for wishing to know; and, for another, I found it utterly impossible to bend a single thought towards her; therefore, for aught I care, she may marry the Pope "

“What a pity it is, my Lord,” said Acantha, “that you don’t make her aware of the extent of her obligations to you for such a vicious permission. But come, now tell us truly what has really happened to you at Grove Park?”

“Oh! the worst of all possible misfortunes. Isn’t it, Lady Sidney?”

“Yes, if falling in love is the worst of misfortunes; for, instead of carrying off the rich heiress as he intended when he parted from us, it seems he has irretrievably lost his heart and offered his hand to our fair friend Florence.”

“Oh! has he indeed,” cried Acantha, clasping her hands with great excitement, “missed the golden monster! as he was impudent enough to call the unfortunate heiress, and taken up with Sir Simper’s almost penniless young friend? Well, that is rich indeed.”

“Come, come,” said his Lordship, not altogether pleased to find the laugh turning

against him in this manner. "Not quite penniless either; for she herself told me she has *three hundred a year*, and a married couple can live very well on that, I hear, in Kamstchatka, or at any rate in Novogorod or Mauritania, or some of these convenient places.

"To which, of course, my Lord," said Acantha, "your habits have so pre-eminently suited you."

"Oh! to a nicety."

"Well! but a truce to your jesting," said Lady Sidney, "and give us the benefit of your advice in a little matter. The difficulty is this;—small as Florence's fortune may be, she is unfortunately a ward in Chancery, and George is afraid that if he runs off with her before she is of age that general tormentor, her step-father, Sir Simper, will be exceedingly troublesome."

"Well, I think that's excessively likely, if that's any consolation to you."

"Nay," said Lord George, "that's not

the worst of the difficulty. There is an opportunity, if we can manage it well, of running off with her to-night from the grand ball that is going to be given ; but, if I let go this opportunity, another may never arise; and yet I hardly know whether we can venture on the grand step to-night, though Florence has referred me to you, Miss Curtis, to plot out the details."

" But first, let me ask," said Acantha, " whether Florence would be able to come to this ball? she is so closely watched and tormented by that she-dragon, Miss Circumspect, that I should very much doubt whether she might not as soon think of getting to the moon as to the masquerade to-night; and if we can't get her to the ball, I confess I am clear on this point, it will be hopeless to think of carrying her away from it."

" Miss Curtis, I am afraid you have been studying the black art, or you never could have arrived at so profound a conclusion ;

but, on that point, set your mind at rest, for I have already made certain that Florence can get to the ball to-night, and, from the ball, I hope, to Gretna Green."

"But is this with Miss Circumspect's knowledge, my Lord?"

"Yes, it is, Miss Curtis; and, though it is scarcely necessary for a man of my known character to add, I may also inform you, it is likewise with Miss Circumspect's fullest approbation."

"Well, I think it is now my turn to accuse you of studying the black art. Do you mean to say, that you have obtained the permission of Aunty Circumspect to take her poor, unfortunate, enslaved young beauty to a masquerade ball?"

"I have, Miss Curtis."

"Why, how, in the name of fortune, have you accomplished it?"

"By those same persuasive powers, my dear Madam, which induced you, on the first day of our acquaintance, to tell me,

that, if you had not already secured Pierre-point as your future Lord, you should have thought yourself only too happy to have surrendered yourself to your humble servant."

"Oh! you good for nothing wretch! I shall actually set my dog to bite you if you do tell such abominable stories. But now, without further jesting, I am quite dying of curiosity to know how you overcame the prudence of that sphinx, Aunt Circumspect. Had you no aid, no assistance?"

"To be sure I had."

"The assistance of whom?"

"A most powerful firm, Messieurs Port Wine, Nutmeg, Sugar, and Hot Water."

"Ha! that won't do, my Lord; that won't do! that's a firm to which Aunt Circumspect has given her entire confidence throughout her life! and, although she has done business with them to a great extent, I am quite certain she would require some stronger magic to be exercised over her

mind, before she would even hear of poor Florence going to a ball. Now, what is it ; come, tell me truly."

" Well, you know I am a Lord."

" Pooh, pooh ! Circumspect is a great fool I admit, but not quite such a silly person as you would have us believe her. She would do a great deal for a Lord ; but not even that would have induced her to let Florence go to a masquerade ball. Come, Sir, confess 'with what drugs, what charms, what conjuration, and what mighty magic, you won this old man's daughter,' or I ought to say sister, but it would not be a direct quotation. Come, Sir, tell me ! What, silent still ? then it must be something very bad !"

CHAPTER VI.

“ He can’t raise his paw up
To blow his own nose,
For fear it should blister his fingers.”

REJECTED ADDRESSES.

For a moment Miss Curzon continued gazing at the other’s countenance ; then, suddenly clasping her hands, she cried, as if in ecstasy, “ Oh ! I have found it out ! I have found it out ! Oh ! you deceitful villain ! you hypocrite of most incomparable pretence ! you have been making love to my Aunt !! You have actually been uttering soft speeches and breathing sweet sighs to Circumspect ! Oh ! that such falsehood should exist in man ! Deny it if you can.”

“ Well, I confess,” said Lord George ;

“all’s fair in war, and finding that a little—a very little of the tender passion, would not be taken amiss in that quarter, I did make a little love to Aunt Circumspect; but, honour bright, it was very little, just the least possible quantity that could be administered with any effect.”

“You atrocious Lord! Confess, now, didn’t you promise to marry her? Come, Sir, no hesitation in the witness-box,” continued Acantha, mimicking the mannerism of which she had lately heard so much in Court.

“Well, yes! I may have promised to marry her certainly; but, as the song says, ‘I never told her when,’ and, honour bright as soon as I have buried my first six wives, she really shall be the seventh.”

“Why, you dreadful Bluebeard, you positively are a disgrace to humanity! I don’t think I really can bring myself even to plot for a creature who dares to talk of the softer sex with such abominable heartlessness, to

say nothing of his deluding away the tender hearts of damsels of five-and-seventy, or thereaway."

"Come, come, Miss Curtis," said Lord George, "you must not exaggerate so grossly—you must know, as I do, that she is only fifty-four."

"Dear flirting angel, she is now only just fifty-four, eh! Well, you are a charming villain, my Lord; I don't know, I am sure, whether it is at all safe to help to deliver Florence and all her hopes into such more than questionable keeping."

"Nay, I am sure, Miss Curtis, you cannot really think ill of me! When once you see age grow tyrannical, instead of relying upon the virtues it possesses for the kind affections of its juniors, I think then it loses all claim to our respect."

"Ah! its all very fine, my Lord, and after you are married, I suppose, when we talk to you of beating your wife, and leaving her at home for a month together, while

you go amusing yourself with your fox-hounds, you'll come out with some such dogma as this. 'When we behold a woman, whom we wooed for her loveliness, degenerating by the mere lapse of time into the faded mother of children, and the mere nurse of squalling boys, the claim she once possessed to our affection, becomes buried in the grave of those charms by which it was first called forth.' "

" Fie! Fie! Miss Curtis, how can you imagine such a thing possible."

" How can I imagine such a thing possible, my Lord?—Tell me how I can have seen it at least fifty times? but I suppose you men are all alike, you will answer me—'Poor Florence, like every other woman, must take her chance,' whether 'she die of neglect as your wife or live perpetually wretched with disappointed vanity and meagrimis like my Aunt Circumspect; and, you may further add, as I have chosen for myself, the chance of the broken heart, as

the least disagreeable one of the two, I suppose I must give Florence the same consideration as myself. But, come, make me one promise, if only for the pleasure I shall have through life in reproaching you for breaking it."

"Well, I will, what is it?"

"Simply that you will behave with some little shew of decency to your wife for at least six weeks after your marriage."

"Well, upon my word, I will promise it! always, providing you don't insist, as you were once inclined to do, upon my marrying you—for with such a torment, as I can see you'll prove to your husband, of course, the thing would be impossible; but that you know."

"Well, my Lord, I admit it—and now having tortured you sufficiently, I confess I have, meanwhile, been considering how to get you out of your difficulty, and have, I think, hit on a likely plan, I'll tell it you at once, without any further teasing."

“ Well, do, that’s a divine creature—what can it be ?”

“ Don’t be in a hurry ! I never allow any one to hurry me—so remember that’s Miss Curtis’s first law of action. The plan which I propose to adopt, is this—”

“ First of all, before I venture to propose a remedy for your difficulties, let me be quite sure that I have a proper understanding of them—that once achieved, I think you may safely rely on Lady Sidney and myself to find for you an extrication out of any difficulties, however alarming. We have a carefully digested plot of our own in hand at this very moment, and I think, by a little skilfull dove-tailing, we might so include you and Florence in our general arrangements, as to bring you safely through all difficulties. What say you, most deceitful of love-lorn lords ? have you sufficient confidence in such generals to trail a pike under our standard ?”

“ I have, most lovely leader—so to the

deadly peril of the breach, or to the very death itself, lead on."

"Now, my Lord, if I understand you rightly, the position in which you stand is this—you and Florence are quite agreed on the perilous trip to Gretna, could you only be made sure that, in so doing, you could keep beyond the fangs of the law. Is that the case?"

"Yes, it is most exactly, and a most provoking case it is; nor do I see how we can deal with it, until we know what the law requires on the point, and for this I had relied on Pierrepont to advise me, as I can't mention such a matter to a stranger. But now, confusion take it! I find I cannot get hold of Pierrepont until such a time as I fear will prove too late for me to act in the matter, inasmuch as he won't be out of Court for an age to come—that is, in love—two hours—he is what they call addressing the Jury, and will not finish for a hundred and twenty mortal

minutes ! Nothing could be more unfortunate."

" Except the Jury," said Miss Curtis.

" True," replied Lord George.

" Well ! but Miss Curtis," interrupted Lady Sidney, " why should we so soon despair—is there no mode of getting over this odious matter of law ? It will never do to have George's bride taken away before the ceremony was well over, and himself sent to pass the honeymoon in prison."

" No, by St. Patrick ! I should then be confined instead of my wife, and beyond the assistance even of a monthly nurse, a lady's consolation under the worst of difficulties."

" Come, my Lord, don't be scurrilous, or we shall leave you to your own devices. If, on the contrary, you will only behave decently, I think I can hit on something that will not only relieve you, but pay off part of my heavy debt to Sir Simper," said Miss Curtis, forgetting for the moment that

Lord George was not in her confidence, and thus, at a single word, very nearly completing the ruin of her grand scheme of mystification, at which she had been labouring so assiduously for so many months.

“What!” said Lord George, looking up with considerable surprise, “what have you, too, a grudge against Sir Simper? I wasn’t aware that you even knew him.”

“Then, my Lord,” replied the ready-witted girl, turning away her face, “you could never have thought much on the subject; flirting as he has been for the last two months with Lady Sidney, and tormenting at once my friend Florence and your friend Mr. Pierrepont, it would be very strange, indeed, if I had not something like a very long debt to repay him.”

“Oh! if you begin to talk of paying your debts,” said Lord George, “I am afraid I must take my departure.”

“Nay, don’t be alarmed, my Lord, mine is simply a debt of hatred.”

“ Oh! I beg pardon, that is quite a different thing, the best bred people in the world may discharge those without the slightest reproach, provided they only add on the interest with a liberal hand.”

“ Précisely ; and that’s just what I mean to do in this case, if you will but have courage to follow up my prescription carefully.”

“ Never fear me in that respect, at any rate,” said his Lordship, “ and now we are all attention, propound your plan.”

“ It is simply this ; Sir Simper is now in Carlisle.”

“ Oh! but I don’t know that, Miss Curtis.”

“ Yes, but we do ; don’t we Lady Sidney?”

“ Why, yes,” replied Lady Sidney, smiling, “ I think we may answer for the presence of Sir Simper in Carlisle—at least he was here this morning, and the business of which he gave us an account, seems likely

to detain him some time before he can bring it to the issue he desires."

" Oh ! very well then, Miss Curtis, that is sufficient, I beg pardon for doubting the correctness of your observation. Now, then, we will once more proceed."

CHAPTER VII..

“Your beauty, your wit, your charms, have been exercised on a rebel.”—LE SAGE.

“Now, my Lord, no more interruptions if you please, or I shall order your Lordship out of Court.”

“I am all obedience.”

“Well, then, we have now arrived at the same point as before. Sir Simper is in Carlisle—you must go to him. You don’t know him, do you?”

“Why, thank Heaven, as yet, that affliction has been spared me.”

“So much the better, you must now go to him, and take in your hand a decent fee—the only bait ever known to catch a

lawyer—say, therefore, ten guineas—a ten pound note, and a sovereign ; and, just as if you were unconcious of the act, hesitate a little in your conversation ; and, as you have seen some orators fidget with their dress and so forth, when speaking in public, so must you in the accidental-on-purpose way, take out the said sovereign from the aforesaid ten pound note—first, twiddle it in your fingers—smooth it out on the table—then, seem to be quite shocked at your indiscretion ; folding the note up hurriedly again, as if to withdraw it from outraging his virtuous eyes, but, always take care *not* to put the note in your pocket. Then proceed to state, with a few well chosen compliments, and the most winning manner a Lord can put on, that the worthy Indian's fame, on a very delicate point of law, has reached you even in London,—or, perhaps the Land's End would be better—yes, say even Cornwall—you're not bound to know that he pretends

to the character of a kind of ex-judge ; but, make out, in short, that at vast personal inconvenience, you have hastened to give yourself the benefit of a few moments conversation with him. Well, then, perhaps he will meet you, by saying that he is very sorry and so forth, and that he has long since shrouded his professional character in the ermined robe. You must not be at all disheartened at this ; cut him short, if you can, but at any rate, take occasion then to remark, that the fact of his retirement, your solicitor has informed you, is too painfully felt and lamented throughout the whole of the profession in India ; but, that there is unfortunately a lady in this case, that will be contented with no inferior opinion. By this time, in all probability, you and the ten guineas will have succeeded with his miserly love of lucre in bringing him into a quiet hearing. If not, you must proceed, in short, to saponalise him till you do."

" Well, I hope, at any rate, after that,

I shall have a chance of what they call going into Court with clean hands ; it will be very hard if I don't"

" Another of your vile jokes, my Lord, and I abandon your cause for ever," said Acantha, with a mock gravity well sustained. Lord George begged pardon, and his monitress once more proceeded.—" Having persisted in your course, until you have obtained a hearing ; once more gradually unfold the ten pound note and sovereign, and this time appear by accident to forget their existence, and so allow them, —unintentionally of course—to lie on the table ; then begin to state your case—pretend to feel somewhat at a loss to place it properly before him, and take up pen and ink. This obtained, suppress your name, but state disguisedly, the exact position in which you stand with respect to Florence ; shewing how it is that you are in terror of the law, and finally, say you are sent by the lady, to obtain his opinion, as to the

best mode of obtaining the ward on the one side, and escaping the woolsack on the other. So soon as ever he begins to tell you what his opinion is—if favourable, you will gently take it down, as if the operation were a mere matter of course; and favourable it will most likely be; therefore, as soon as he has finished delivering it, you can pretend that you have not got it quite right, and ask him to correct it for you. If you can only get this, Lady Sidney and I think you will be safe; and to accomplish this, you had better take care that you keep the money just conveniently within your own reach, so as to hold out to him, the possibility of that ancient and secure system—no work, no pay. If he at once corrects the opinion for you, quietly pocket it—take no notice of the fee, make him a thousand thanks and come away.”

“ Well, but ” said his Lordship, “ do you think it would be safe for us to rely on Sir Simper’s opinion? don’t you think he

might see through our plot, and advise us wrongly ?”

“ Oh ! no, he will never see through it ; but our object is not only to gain his advice how to act ; but don’t you see, if you have his opinion, and follow it, and succeed in running off with his step-daughter, it may puzzle him afterwards to kick against it, when you will have it in your power to produce his own written opinion, advising you to the step.”

“ Capital ! capital !” exclaimed Lord George, “ what a loss did the genius of Guy Fawkes sustain, that you lived not at the period to assist him with your counsels. The plot is inimitable, and, at any rate, I will make every effort to carry it out. All I fear is, that we may have underrated the cunning of our adversary. For my part, I confess, I cannot hope that he will so easily be trepanned ; seeing he is a man who has past his life in all sorts of keen manœuvres ; besides, it strikes me, Miss

Curtis, that you have forgotten one very material point in the matter which is this, —if he has ever held anything like a judicial post, he cannot now give opinions and take fees.”

“ Why my Lord,” replied Acantha, “ you are under a great mistake here, Sir Simper, I believe, was never called to the bar, but was merely a Scotch writer to the Signet ; and if he had ever filled any judicial situation in England, no doubt you might as soon hope to find out three North West passages at once, as to carry into effect the little scheme we have hatched against him ; but, in the present case, you forget that you have only to deal with a mere Indian of the old school, who, having gone out to the East, was, I suspect, for want of a better person, made a judge in some distant and savage spot, or in some miserable court, and with whom, I have no doubt, avarice, money making, and all the golden orient vices, have become quite a necessary part of

existence. Depend upon it, right or wrong, a stingy, avaricious old miser like Sir Simper, will be utterly unable to resist even so paltry a fee as ten guineas, more especially if you take care never to offer it directly to him, but leave it behind you as it were by accident."

"Well! at any rate," said Lord George, "it is but a trial; I don't care a fig whether he's pleased, or savage, or what. Now, as you know that he is in Carlisle, I dare say you have his address; just give me that, and I will set off and carry this freak into execution at once, and I must say, that the more I think of your plot, Miss Curtis, the more I am pleased with it. Nothing in nature could surpass it, except a bridge over the Irish Channel."

"And that," replied Acantha, "I am sure is quite unnecessary, for the passage by, which such a bull could, in a moment, be transported, might answer for any transit."

“Including, I suppose, the transit of Venus, so soon as you should go ;” said the gallant Irishmen, motioning for his fair confederate to proceed through the door which he had already opened.

“Adieu, my Lord,” returned Miss Curtis, “as soon as your interview with Sir Simper is over, present yourself here to report your success.”

“Bye, bye then, for the present George,” added Lady Sydney, “and remember ‘faint heart never won fair lady.’”

As the hour was fast approaching that crisis which must, in one way or the other, terminate Lord George’s fate as a lover ; he no sooner quitted the house of the sister-in-law than he hastened in the direction pointed out to him to seek the apartments of Sir Simper, who having somewhat altered his plan after the last time we beheld him in the house of Lady Dunvext, had thought that a temporary residence in

Carlisle would forward his views much more than a return to his own residence at Grove Park,

Napoleon is asserted to have exclaimed on intelligence of Trafalgar, "I can't be every where at once," and so with much more justice, might Sir Simper have used the same phrase, had he known what mischief had occurred in his own fold during his absence at Carlisle. When, therefore, judging of his manner in receiving Lord George, we must bear in mind, that at the time of Lord George's self presentation, Sir Simper was, not only wholly unacquainted with his person, but did not even know that any one was aware of Florence being so beautiful and accomplished a creature; he calculated, as cunning men too often do, that from his plans being of the subtlest nature, success could not fail to wait on them, and that, therefore, he should find little or no trouble in detaining Florence,

under his wing, so long as that detention could be turned to his account, or if she would be married, marrying her, ultimately, in such a manner, that her marriage should prove to his advantage.

CHAPTER VIII.

“The lady who you were told engrossed my thoughts, is but an imaginary mistress.”—LE SAGE.

FROM what I have said in the last chapter, it will be seen that Sir Simper was, in a manner, already laid open by his own cunning for his own defeat; and when it was announced to him that a stranger wished an audience, he had no more suspicion that it was on any matter hostile to his plans, than it was, for any purpose, seeking to overthrow the dynasty of the house of Hanover. Still he was always marvellously tetchy, in any matter that related to allowing strangers the *entrè* of his presence. A trick to which charlatans, and would-be-

Grandeess, often have recourse as a paltry mode of imitating that apparent greatness and pomp, they are weak enough to covet, as if the mere assumption of the vice of an order could ever be confounded with the real possession of the order itself.

“Wants to see me,” said Sir Simper, “did he give his name.”

“No Sir,” said the servant, “he gave no name.”

“Go down and ask him for his name.” The man departed, and returning to Lord George, said—

“My master desired me to say that he that he is very busy, but if you will send up your name, I’ll let you know whether he can see you.”

“Tell him,” said Lord George, “that it is a gentleman who wishes to see him on very important business, but whose name he would not know from that of Adam, if he heard it this moment.”

There was something in the imperious

manner of his Lordship as he said this, that induced the servant to return to the presence of the Indian, with the message, which he delivered verbatim.

“ Very extraordinary !” exclaimed Sir Simper, “ wants to see me, and won’t send his name. Very mysterious ! I can’t see him, be he whom he may.”

“ Very well, I will send him away then Sir,” said the servant.

“ Stay John, stay ; what sort of a looking person is he.”

“ A gentleman, Sir.”

“ Sure of that, John ?”

“ Certain, Sir ; I should say a man of rank, by his look and manner.”

“ A man of rank !” echoed the Indian. “ Pooh, pooh ! how long have you been able to judge men of rank by their look and manners ?”

“ Well, Sir, I thought so,” said the servant, deferentially, and in an appeasing manner.

“ Oh! you did, did you? and pray may I ask, for my own information, what it is that stamps the man of rank in your eyes?”

The servant, accustomed to be taken up in this sharp snappish manner, here looked down somewhat confused, began playing with the lock, and even made an attempt to withdraw.

“ Well, Sir, I am waiting for an answer,” said Sir Simper, who seemed perfectly heedless of Lord George at the door, and, indeed, the Indian appeared to consider that standing on his stone steps was an exercise remarkably healthy. Suddenly, however, a violent peal at the door-bell conveyed a hint that Lord George had entertained a somewhat different opinion.

“ The front door, Sir,” said the valet, on hearing this summons, and tried once more to get away.

“ I know it,” was the laconic answer of his master; “ but tell me, what is it stamps

the man of rank, in your eyes? Did'nt you hear me ask the question? I am curious, for my own information, to know. Come, Sir, I can't be kept waiting," continued Sir Simper, who clearly saw a vast difference between his own case and that of a mere visitor at his gate."

"Well, Sir," said the servant, thus bullied into a defence of his own opinion, and determined, in so doing, to have a severe cut at his master, "I think him a man of rank, because his manners are so civil and well-bred like."

"Is that all, Sir, that makes a man of rank, then, in your view?"

"Why, that chiefly, Sir; besides, there is a sort of look in the gentleman's eye, that seems to show he knows himself entitled to one's respect, without any swaggering."

"You may go," said Sir Simper, tartly, "and ask him what is his business?"

Here another impatient peal of the bell

bespoke the evident dislike of the man of rank to be kept waiting one moment longer than was absolutely necessary. The valet hastened to the door, and seeing some marks of impatience in the visitor's countenance, said to his Lordship—

“I am very sorry to have kept you waiting, Sir, so long, but my master desires to know what your business is?”

“Oh!” replied his Lordship, vexed into momentary petulance, “this fellow is as great a humbug as the Grand Seigneur. Tell your master, my good man, that he would not understand my business if I were to explain it to you; and, that all I can tell you, is, it is about some money matters.”

When the unfortunate valet once more trotted back to Sir Simper's room, he found the Indian in the act of taking an observation from the window. Sir Simper blushed a grim, ghastly yellow—a sort of expiring cabbage colour—at being thus detected; and in order to extricate himself, as it were,

from this position, began abruptly to cross-examine his servant.

“Does he give his business, John?”

“No, Sir.”

“Then, I won’t see him. Does he give his name, John?”

“No, Sir.”

“Then shut the door in his face.”

“Please, Sir, he says he’s come about money matters.”

“Oh! show him up.”

In an instant the position of the Indian was changed. At the time that well-bred and peremptory command was given, to shut the door in his visitor’s face, Sir Simper was busy; but he had no sooner come to the contrary instruction of—“Show him up”—than the lid of his temporary writing-case was swiftly thrown open, and the whole of the papers on which he was engaged were hurriedly thrown in, and hid from every possibility of being seen by the new-comer. Sir Simper hastily pulled from his pocket a

small comb, drew it carefully through his hair three or four times before the glass—set his collar quite straight—drew down his waistcoat—pulled to his coat—quickly settled himself in his chair—and, taking up a volume of Paley, apparently devoted his whole soul to the work he was perusing. While, however, he was thus attitudinizing for the reception of his unknown visitor, it was evident, from the furtive glance stolen from out the corners of his eyes, that his ears were fully awake to take in every sound. Presently, he heard a most martial footstep advancing along the passages, and, again and again, he said to himself—“Who the devil can this be?”

He was evidently quite at a loss to know who was about to present himself; and, indeed, quite as much so as his valet. And when, at length, Lord George made his appearance, Sir Simper sent a penetrating glance over the exterior of his Lordship, as he moved to take a chair, and perfectly

agreed with his valet, as he gazed on the bold, decided, yet polished features of Lord George, that he certainly was, in every sense of the word, a gentleman, whose exterior warranted the probability of his being a man of high rank. This at once induced the worldly-minded Indian to grant a very gracious reception to the mysterious stranger; and, motioning him to a chair, his Lordship, with a coolness that quite matched all the calculation of the other, proceeded very leisurely to disrobe himself of hat, and gloves, and cane; and, being thus left more at ease, he next commenced the preliminaries of their meeting, by explaining, in the most courtierlike phrase, and with a winningness of manner of which his Lordship was a great master.—

“ His extreme regret that urgent affairs should have compelled him to intrude into the presence of a gentleman to whom he was not personally known; but, that circumstances sometimes obliged men to steps

somewhat repugnant to their general feelings ; and in this, I hope Sir Simper," said his Lordship, " you will find my apology."

Sir Simper bowed—as much as to say.—“ Don’t mention it, my Lord.” Up to this moment, the lover had proceeded with that easy self possession and fluency for which he was remarkable, when not before a jury ; but at this point—wonderful to say, he began to hammer and stammer, and cough and hesitate in as remarkable a degree, as if he had then been once more essaying his maiden speech ; and, in order to relieve himself—poor young gentleman, the forefinger and thumb of his right hand, seemed to find their way with wonderful dexterity into his right hand waistcoat pocket. Here, Sir Simper, who was watching him with all the critical accuteness of a man accustomed to excel in public speaking himself, and who seemed perfectly to comprehend his case, beheld him draw forth a small piece of crumpled paper, holding

some enclosure, and begin to twist it between his finger and thumb ; but, we must add, that Sir Simper almost fainted, when in this paper, thus irreverently treated, he beheld nothing less than that most precious species of papyru which he so highly esteemed, as emanating from the Governor and Company of the Bank of England.

CHAPTER IX.

“ Your question, answered the demon, has been a hundred times debated, and is still discussed every day.”—LE SAGE.

I OUGHT not perhaps, but I certainly will aver, that it was this feeling of reverence, and not the base one of pecuniary lucre, that so riveted the eyes of the Indian miser on the said note, that he felt himself utterly unable to pay the slightest attention to the rounded periods of Lord George ; though, after the production and twisting of the note aforesaid, the speaker, wonderful to say, appeared to have recovered the power of expressing his thoughts with as much ease as before.

Lord George, however, immediately per-

ceived the effect which the paper produced on Sir Simper, but, of course, not knowing its cause, and attributing it, mistaken man, to the vile supposition that this eagerness on the part of the oriental sage, proceeded from a sheer love of the coin ; he became absolutely afraid that while the money remained exposed to the other's view, he would get no attention whatever to his case. It occurred to him, that instead of spreading it out on the table, as Acantha had suggested, doubtless, under a notion that this would be absolutely necessary even to draw the other's notice towards its presence, that if he simply folded it up and put it in his pocket, it might, by leaving the subtle Indian in doubt as to its real amount, be still more tempting, inasmuch as it would excite that desire to ascertain the fact, which ever leads mortals on—more especially where the pursuit is one in which they ought not to indulge. As soon as the note was returned to Lord George's pocket, Sir

Simper's self-possession appeared at once to have returned to him.

“ Perhaps you will be kind enough to state your case briefly, for time—time is the essence of everything in this transitory world of ours,” said Sir Simper, “ where at the utmost, the longest of our leases is unhappily of short duration. .

“ True Sir Simper ! True, and at once, therefore, to come to the point ; I am afraid you will think me very foolish, or if you do not,—I, at least, think you very provoking, and certainly much regret that the fame of a great lawyer should travel so far, as in your case it has done ; for, ashamed as I ought to be to confess it, you must know Sir, I have travelled no less a distance than from a remote county, to this extremity of the kingdom, to enjoy the privilege I now possess, of an interview with you. I am sent to you by a lady of great beauty and high rank,”—here Lord George with infinite delight, beheld Sir

Simper prick up his ears in the most edifying manner. “ Yes Sir, I say, by a lady of great beauty and high rank, to consult you on a question most vital to her interests.” Here his Lordship made a momentary pause, during which Sir Simper took occasion to interrupt him.

“ I am afraid, Sir,” said Sir Simper, “ you are addressing me under the belief, or rather, I should say, in error of the fact, that I have long since ceased to practise my profession.”

“ I know it, Sir Simper—I know it—and I blush to admit how greatly I am trespassing on your kindness, but”—and here his Lordship’s hand made another motion towards the pocket—“ I trust that the family interest will one day repay you. Oh ! yes,” his Lordship continued, seeing that the other did not refuse him his attention ; “ and, as the lady’s solicitor told her, the whole profession in India is too painfully well aware that you have ceased to give the public the benefit of your talents. But still,

as this lady, this noble lady—as, I trust, she will soon possess a right to be called—would hear of no inferior opinion, I do hope that, for the sake of that lady, and the high confidence she has shown in your generosity, that you will not send me back into Cornwall, to tell her, that I have failed in a matter wherein she specially commanded my success.”

“Well, Sir, though it does, at first, appear somewhat singular that I should be known in Cornwall, perhaps you will state your case; I may then be able to see whether I can be of any use to you or not.”

“I am deeply beholden to you,” said his Lordship. “I am sure you have only to hear that case, to render her the eminent assistance in your power.”

“Well, Sir, what are the facts?”

“They are these:—The lady who has sent me to you, is the daughter of a noble viscount. Her father dying when she was very young, the widow soon afterwards

married another noble lord. Now, the daughter was left an heiress, to what exact extent, perhaps, I do not know. Perhaps it is unnecessary for us now to enquire. At any rate, she was left an heiress, and made a ward in Chancery. Her stepfather's solicitor was appointed receiver to the estate, and her step-father, to a certain degree, became her guardian—that is, in other words, being an active-minded, meddling, busy-bodied sort of person, he thought fit to assume every authority the privilege of the circumstances gave him, greatly to the dislike of the lady, who, I believe, has little love for him, and, indeed, suspects him of wanting to force her to marry some of his own creatures.”

“ Ah! Sir,” interrupted Sir Simper again, “ we had better keep to the mere facts of the case.”

“ Precisely,” said Lord George. “ And they next present themselves in this shape : — The mother of the young lady dies, and

the widower then becomes the sole relative of the young orphan—for such she may very properly be termed, having lost both her parents, though she has still the tediousness of submitting to the control of one who cannot be supposed to entertain for her that affection, which alone can make a parent's authority endurable, whenever that authority becomes wielded with any thing like severity."

Here Sir Simper 'gave a shrewd look at his watch, as much as to say—

"You came to ask me my opinion, young man, not to deliver a lecture on morals."

His Lordship took the hint, and proceeded—

"Now, Sir, the main point on which the whole of this question turns, is this—"

"Now, Sir, let me hear that," said Sir Simper.

"The young lady has fallen in love."

"I thought so," interrupted Sir Simper; "and you are the man."

Lord George started almost to his feet with surprise, as Sir Simper, in a most decided tone, gave utterance to this sentence, his Lordship, for the moment, fearing that he had discovered the secret, and that all was lost. This assertion was, however, but a trick of that guilty conscience which “doth, indeed, make cowards of us all.” And, after a few moment’s reflection, his Lordship plainly perceived that it was a mere guess of Sir Simper, founded on the evident reasoning, that, unless his Lordship were the lover, he would never have taken the trouble to have come all the way from Cornwall to obtain an opinion, even for the young and lovely heiress. Smiling, therefore, as soon as he regained his presence of mind, Lord George proceeded to add—

“Well, Sir Simper, whether I am the lucky swain or not, believe me, as soon as the marriage takes place, you shall be one of the first persons to have intelligence of it. And, if you will deign to accept the ‘

friendship and interest of the distinguished house into which that lady is anxious to marry, you may certainly command it."

"All this was extremely true; but Sir Simper, who, of course, knew not in what its truth consisted, translated it very differently from what the real facts of the case would have warranted him in doing, and, with innumerable bows and smiles, expressed his extreme happiness to be, in any case, of any use, and his Lordship proceeded—

"After what I have just stated, you may imagine, Sir Simper, that the interviews of the lovers are extremely few and difficult."

"Yes, Sir," said Sir Simper, "that would naturally and most unfortunately be so; too bad, too bad!" he added, in a most sympathising tone, little imagining that he was all the while passing judgment on himself.

"But," continued Lord George, "you know the old song, Sir Simper, 'Love will find out the way,' and a handsome fellow

like yourself, I am sure, must often have proved its truth."

This was Lord George's very best hit ; here he had the Indian hip and thigh, and the delight felt by the would-be-beau at this seemingly impartial testimony to his vigour and still enduring youth, sensible that every passing year was driving him more and more ruthlessly from those bowers of Venus in which he had delighted to shine, was immense. Bending towards Lord George with more attention than he had hitherto shown, he nodded his head from time to time with that sort of auditorial complacency which all speakers appear to have recognised, as conveying the very best augury of success,

"Love will find out the way ; or rather," said Sir Simper, as if mightily pleased with the remembrance, "blindness, I confess, does not seem to stand much in the young gentleman's path, as far as his powers of guidance are concerned."

“ Well, Sir Simper, this being so, the lovers, it seems, have met, and not only that, but in a very short time an opportunity will occur for their elopement. Now, a very short time exists before the Lady comes of age.” Here the Indian held up his finger, and Lord George, in obedience to the signal, came to a halt. ..

CHAPTER X.

“ When dear Cupid clearly saw
Love must fight against the law,
Swift his bowstring did he draw ;
But, when Love took thought again,
All his shafts he said were vain,
Love was just as good as slain ;
For, at once, the blind god knew
The chancellor to be, at view,
Of all his votaries most true ;
Not more learned in law than love,
In courts below or courts above,
Well then might his godship be
Certain of my lord’s decree.”

“ IN a short time the young lady comes of age,” slowly repeated the Indian ; “ well, then, why don’t the young people take the most obvious course of waiting till that event occurs ?”

“ Why, first, Sir Simper, because they don’t like waiting, and I believe lovers very

rarely do ; and next, if they were to wait, it is strongly feared," added his Lordship, "that the step-father, who it is greatly suspected does not stick at a trifle, will interpose to their union some obstacle, so positive as to prevent the young people from ever surmounting it ; therefore, they think they had better seize the opportunity of elopement that now presents itself."

"Certainly," said Sir Simper, "I think so too ; but where in all this is the difficulty requiring my opinion."

"Why, here, Sir Simper, the Lady has sent me especially to know how to avoid the dilemma with which she has often been threatened by his Lordship, in case of marrying while a minor, without the consent of the Court of Chancery, or in other words, his Lordship."

"It isn't the Chancellor's daughter, or one of his nieces, is it, eh?" said Sir Simper, throwing himself funnily enough upon the most blundering scent.

Lord George made no answer, but simply smiled.

“O, you may safely trust me you know,” said Sir Simper, in a coaxing tone, “any one may make confidants of lawyers; like tomb-stones, they are bound merely to record the virtues of their clients, but to be dumb to all defects. Come, come, you may as well tell me; I promise I won’t let it pass.”

“Why, Sir Simper,” said his Lordship, “you may be sure if there was any one to whom I would confide anything, after all that has passed between us, that person would be yourself; but, the lady, foreseeing, I have no doubt, the difficulty in which I might thus be placed, obliged me to give her my solemn promise, that I would not, even in the most indistinct manner, give the slightest hint that might denote her identity to any mortal breathing; you will, therefore, I am sure, excuse any apparent want of confidence, though, at the same

time, I am sure an acute mind like yours, can, without any difficulty, put two and two together,”

“Admirably managed, my dear Sir ; admirably managed. Yes, I see, it must be the Chancellor’s neice,—I had heard something of her being a ward of Court. Well, that’s extremely droll, and now, between ourselves, I may tell you that I am right glad of it. Yes, but between ourselves, Sir, I have long owed his Lordship a little debt for a good-natured remark of his Lordship as to my being placed in the Commission, and now an opportunity occurs of turning the tables upon him ; depend upon it, that if any advice or even assistance of mine can enable you to turn his Lordship’s wit the seamy side without — you shall have ; you shall have it. Egad ! that is capital ; between us both, it will be very hard indeed, if, this time, his Lordship doesn’t go to the walk.”

“Why, yes, I think Sir, there is every

appearance of this consultation not being held in vain," replied Lord George, who could scarcely keep his gravity as he reflected on the egregious blunder the other was perpetrating; and which he well deserved to perpetrate, since it was quite clear that private malice was leading him on to revenge himself, as he thought, upon another; when, in reality, he was only, as is generally the case with malicious people, in this world—heaping coals of fire upon his own head.

“ Well, then,” resumed Sir Simper, “ if the case be exactly as you state it to me, I should certainly advise you to act with the very greatest caution. Under any circumstances, the running off with a ward of Chancery, is an enterprise of great danger; but, when that ward happens to be nearly related to the head of the court, you may be sure that every effort will be used to shield her and every power of law most carefully employed against any one who may

attempt to win her from its protection.—Indeed, this is a most difficult matter on which to advise, and very little scope is left for ingenuity. Some people, not acquainted with the law, have absurdly supposed, that if the lady hires the carriage and horses, and takes up the gentleman on the road, that he thereby escapes, and that she runs away with him ; but this is a mere fallacy. His adoption of her contempt of court, makes it his contempt also ; to say nothing of his marrying her without the court's consent. All that can be effected in this case, is,—to let her get safely off beyond the ordinary jurisdiction of the court, which only includes England and Wales,—when once beyond this pale, marry her according to the law of the spot, and there reside till she comes of age. You may then safely return within the jurisdiction of the Court of Chancery, and claim her property. All that the Chancellor can then do, will be to tie it up as tightly as he can in settlement,

provided she consents to his so doing ; but, if she boldly declares she requires no settlement, when he asks her apart from you as her husband, then in that case, he has no alternative but to surrender it according to the trusts of the dead, or will, under which she is entitled, without prejudice to the marital rights of the fortunate abductor.— This I should say is all the information that I can afford to you,” added Sir Simper, after a pause. “ Your course must be a bold one ; but, after all, it is sufficiently simple, and certainly I shall be anxious to hear of your success.—I don’t know that if we were to discuss this matter for a month, that I could say anything further.

“ I am everlastingly in your debt, Sir Simper,” said Lord George—as soon as the Indian had ceased speaking, and his Lordship fumbled once more in the waistcoat pocket—“ but, I do hope, indeed I know, I may soon have an opportunity of paying you off in full—heavy as the

debt is ; I will not further take up your valuable time at present, except just to reduce your advice into a written memorandum ; and taking up the pen as if for the purpose of doing so, his Lordship began to recite everything diametrically opposite to that which the other had just told him, blotting and making the most direful confusion of the whole matter ; it was possible for him to do.

“ Good Lord,” muttered Sir Simper, as if a new light had burst upon him.—“ is it possible that I can have been talking all this time to a mere fool !” then, feeling as if the moments were growing doubly precious, he added, “ excuse me, Sir ; it strikes me that I am more accustomed to the pen than yourself, I will soon secure for your remembrance, the few hints I have been able to give you,” and taking the pen from the other’s too willing hand, the fairly entrapped Indian, rapidly jotted down the points of his advice.—“ There, Sir, said

he, as he tossed over the paper to his Lordship; “ I think that will now do for you,—that isn’t a strictly legal opinion, you know; all this is done simply as your friend—these are just the heads of my caution to you on the subject; and I must say—take care how you act upon them. You are playing a dangerous game,—as it is scarcely necessary to add, is always the case when a woman is in the affair; though it is much the same in all matters through life, yet, in their case, especially—danger and pleasure—sworn friends, delight to go hand in hand.”

“ Well, and that’s the real reason why the two emotions ever give to courage so warm a welcome; like the rose, thistle and shamrock; to my mind, the three emotions are never so powerful as when all are united. But as to danger being specially linked with woman, that must certainly be freely admitted by me—who have got into many a good scrape by that said junction before

now, and still live in the hope of doing so again ; and I suppose you also speak from experience ?”

“ No Sir, I can’t say that,” replied the Indian, “ its true I *have* been concerned in little feminine adventures, in my life, but have always taken good care that they should never pull me into a scrape.”

“ What,” said Lord George, “ have you never been taken in then ?”

“ Never Sir,” said Sir Simper, “ that man or woman either, I flatter myself, does not exist, capable of taking me in ; very few men, I believe, in the first place, would attempt it, and the woman who thinks to do so, may tell me of it.”

“ No, no,” said Lord George, rather cleverly, “ if she is a true woman, she will never do that, she will take you in first, and tell you of it afterwards.”

CHAPTER XI.

*“The impatient boy,
He gazed, he thrilled with deep delight,
Then clapped his wings for joy.”*

COLERIDGE.

BOTH the gentlemen laughed loudly at Lord George's repartee, and Sir Simper added:—

“Well, well, I believe as far as declaring what a woman's tactics may be, you perhaps, have the best of the argument, but this, however, I can speak to, that take me in who will, thus much I will say, that if they do, I most freely forgive them.”

“Well, that is very consolatory, Sir Simper; it is certainly, the most Christian speech I have yet heard you make, and I congratulate you upon it accordingly. Whenever I hear of any one rousing your

wrath, I shall not fail to allude to the forgiving doctrine you have just preached."

"Do, do, Sir! and I shall esteem myself under a peculiar obligation to you, for recalling to me those principles which I must confess, *foolish as they may be*, have formed, hitherto, the leading doctrine of my life, and which, not all the ingratitude of a weak, and therefore, an ungrateful world can drive me into abjuring."

"Well, Sir Simper, I will now wish you good morning," said Lord George, "I am sorry to have trespassed at such great length upon your time, which I know must be valuable."

"Oh! not at all, not at all! I am only glad if I can have been of use."

"Use! use! of the greatest use, Sir Simper; and this document," quoth Lord George, taking up the opinion, "I shall bestow most carefully in my pouch." Folding up the opinion, as if to put it away, his Lordship, very dexterously drew forth,

first of all, that piece of Bank of England paper, which had so rivetted Sir Simper's regards and throwing this carelessly down on the ground, as if simply to make room for the more precious document, left the money idly lying derelict, seized his hat, cane, and gloves, and cordially shook the Baronet by the hand, saying—"now, Sir Simper, good morning, believe me, I shall always consider myself your debtor—on the behalf of the lady, of course—for this mornings service, and when the happy pair, for whom I am interested, are at length firmly united, I hope they will still possess the pleasure of your friendship."

"Oh, my dear Sir!" said Sir Simper, "as far as that relies on me, I beg you to count, most unhesitatingly, on my warmest assistance in the most unequivocal manner, and above all things, I beg that as soon as ever you have the Chancellor's niece fast, you will let me know, I really shall be delighted in the matter."

“ Well! do you know, my good friend,” said his Lordship, ere he departed, “ men foolishly—excuse the word—nurture visions, or, I should say anticipate acts of revenge. and yet, when the moment comes, I suspect you will experience no such delight as you imagine.”

“ Pardon me, Sir! pardon me, Sir!” returned Sir Simper, suddenly laying his hand on his Lordship’s shoulder, and for the first time, allowing to rise the unleavened hatred of his heart, “ I’ll tell you what I shall do, on the very moment that I hear you have the girl fast, and beyond the power of the Court to interfere; I who know his Lordship well enough to have a fair excuse for the step, will sit down and write him a letter of congratulation, on the fact of his niece’s marriage.”

“ Will you, indeed, Sir,” said Lord George, who could scarcely refrain from smiling in the other’s face.

“ Yes, that will I,” repeated the man

who was thus fondly plotting an insult to himself.

“ Well, then,” said Lord George, “ if that is your wish, perhaps you would like me to contrive it. I beg your pardon, that is, I mean to say, you would like the lady to contrive it so, that information from you should be the very first intelligence the guardian should gain of his ward’s marriage?”

“ I should be eternally obliged to you,” said Sir Simper, “ it would be so sweet to me, oh, so sweet!” and as the Indian repeated this, he clasped his Lordship’s hand with a sort of fiendish pleasure; adding, after a short pause, “ I should really take this act at your hands as a very great favour.”

“ Then,” said Lord George, in a most emphatic manner, “ that favour you certainly shall enjoy, and till that hour arrives, adieu.”

“ Adieu, Sir!” echoed Sir Simper, and in a few minutes more the Indian regained

his chair, and Lord George, convulsed with suppressed laughter, was pursuing his way towards the house of his sister-in-law.

On the moment that Lord George was released from Sir Simper's presence, he hastened off as we have already said, to the house of his sister-in-law, and as a young man with a prospect before his eyes of speedily gaining that fair girl for whom he had so long sighed, his steps were not of the very slowest order.

"Give me joy, give me joy, my dear Lady Sidney!" cried he, rushing into the room where Miss Curtis and herself were then seated. "I've sold Sir Simper, sold him most terrifically," and his Lordship danced about the room with a degree of delight that was almost childish.

"What, my dear fellow, have you got from him the opinion?"

"Every line of it, my dear girl."

"And is it practicable to manage the affair as we wished?"

“ Oh, it couldn't possibly be better, but here it is, you shall read it yourself, in his own handwriting,” and Lord George took from his pocket, and put before his sister's eyes, the veritable document which had required so much trouble, and which, he had showed considerable skill in gaining. Lady Sidney glanced her eyes over every word with the utmost eagerness, and when she came to the conclusion, exclaimed with a shout of joy as she clapped her little hands—

“ Oh, haven't we completely outwitted the old fox this time !”

“ Why, yes,” said Lord George, “ I think we may flatter ourselves on having done that without any foolish exultation ; it certainly appears to me that man never yet was more gloriously taken in the meshes of his own net ; for listen to this, who do you think he imagines to be the lady for whom he has given this opinion ?”

“Who?” breathlessly exclaimed both the hearers.

“The Lord Chancellor’s niece.” The shouts of laughter in which both Miss Curtis and Lady Sydney joined, at hearing of this admirable *contre temps*, were uproarious; and when his Lordship informed them that Sir Simper had, in a great degree, been induced to aid the elopement with his advice, out of revenge to the Chancellor, for having uttered some sarcasm as to his being in the commission of the peace—their mirth was scarcely limitable. While yet, however, they were in the midst of their rejoicings, a terrific peel at the bell and knocker suspended their merriment.

“Who can that be,” demanded both the ladies; but, as is general in such cases, no one being in the secret, and the matter being, after all, nothing so very wonderful, no one could inform the fair querists who demanded admittance, until that general enlightener in such matters, namely, John

the footman, walked in, and announced the fact that—

“Sir Simper Wily begged the pleasure of an interview with one of the ladies.”

“Now take my word for it, Miss Curtis, if he isn’t come to fulfil my prophecy,” said Lady Sydney.

“Then,” said Miss Curtis “if he is, woe *betide him,*” but *what this prophecy was,* neither of the ladies explained to his Lordship; he appeared to think that if it was anything they desired him to know, they would in due time inform him; and, on the contrary, if it was nothing they wished him to know, he had no right to intrude on their confidence; he, therefore, took no notice of the affair, but quietly proceeded to amuse his sister-in-law with divers details of his interview with the Indian. While, however, he was giving these, in a style and manner, that certainly did not allow them to want any due piquancy, we will accompany the heiress, and witness her

interview with that faultless man, her guardian. When Acantha entered the room, she found its occupant gazing, with an anxious wistful look, from one of the windows towards the lawn; and so absorbed was his attention, that he heard not the light step, or rustle of rich satin, that would have told him of the approach of the lady whom he sought.

“ Well, Sir Simper,” gaily said his ward, whose rule it was that nothing on earth was worth the trouble of a sigh—a doctrine only too excellent if we can but adhere to it—“ to what am I indebted for the pleasure of your society at this hour ?”

“ Ah, my dear Madam,” replied the Indian, sighing, “ you know my weakness ; I ought to have lived long enough to feel that truth is too dangerous a matter to be generally spoken, but I confess I must plead guilty to the weakness of loving it, not wisely, but too well, and so then I confess me freely of my sin, and tell you

frankly that you are indebted for what you jestingly term the pleasure of my acquaintance, to the real delight I must ever feel 'in yours ;" and Sir Simper, whose manner could at will be very charming, as his person and voice were by nature most agreeable, at these words gently and gracefully approached his ward, and respectfully raised her hand to his lips.

CHAPTER XII.

“ I saw her upon nearer view,
A spirit and a woman too”

WORDSWORTH.

“ COME, come, Sir Simper,” said Acantha in her resolute though bantering tone, “ I’ll have none of this absurd flirtation, you know very well that if you are a true knight to any one, it is to charming Lady Sidney, and therefore don’t come persuading me that my poor pretensions have the slightest chance in the same field with *her’s*.”

“ Ah, dearest Miss Acantha,” returned Sir Simper, with a deep sigh, “ how well you know the power of those bewitching eyes—how well you know that whatever you

may say, no one who can command such glances as your's can fail to obtain a pardon however much they may calumniate."

"Calumniate! why, Sir Simper, what nonsense are you talking—what do you mean, do you think I jest?"

"Nay, I know you do," replied the Indian, with a tone of voice and manner which would have persuaded almost any one that he really believed what he said.

"You think I jest, do you?" said Miss Curtis.

Sir Simper slightly nodded.

"Well, then," said the beauty, "on my honour I do nothing of the sort; but I mean, in sober downright earnestness, what I said; namely, that you know very well that you are the sworn admirer of Lady Sidney, and therefore I will not have you come paying extravagant love-compliments to me."

"Lady Sidney! my dear Miss Acantha, I am surprised to hear you; do you mean

to say that Lady Sidney ever uttered to you any such sentiment ?”

“ What business is it of yours, Sir Simper, whether she has or not ?” quietly, but somewhat dictatorially, said the beauty to the Indian, “ do you imagine, for a moment, that if Lady Sidney had made me her confidante I would ever have allowed you to wile her secrets from me ? What a pretty foolish sort of simpleton you mistake me to be, or else no very desirable confidante, to dream that in such a case I would give up the secret confided to me in any matter, more especially if the secret related to a lady, and the matter of it that lady’s attachment to a gentleman. No, no, don’t think me quite so foolish, nor yet so blameable, I beg.”

“ My dear Miss Acantha, I am sure you greatly mistake me, I did not for a moment suppose such a thing.”

“ Oh ! no doubt you never did ; but you see your conduct unhappily implied it, so

that you must admit it was very unfortunate for you, to say the least of it.

“ Well, I protest, you judge me most harshly ; you do indeed, Miss Acantha, both as to my imagining that you could, for an instant, tamper with the confidence of a friend, or that I had ever contemplated paying attention, that is, in a lover-like manner, to Lady Sidney.”

“ Ah, me !” said Acantha, sighing, “ how direful is the atrocious falsehood of mankind ; and here have I been watching and regarding your conduct for the last I don’t know how many months, quite convinced that you could be entertaining no other intention than that of inducing Lady Sidney to become Lady Wily, and now you tell me that you have never even been dreaming of paying any attention to her as a lover. Alack, alack, as I said before, who can trust in you false creatures called men ? And so you do really mean to persist in saying that you have not all this time been

the serious admirer of my friend, Lady Sidney?"

"On my honour, as a man, I do," replied the worthy Indian Baronet, laying his hand on his heart, an action which an esteemed contemporary has justly said, "to be most in vogue with those who happen to have the least heart to proffer."

"And do you also mean to say that you have never paid her any attention as a lover?"

"Most decidedly I do."

"Then may I ask, Sir Simper, if not as a lover, pray in what capacity may it have been that you have paid her so much attention; for, at any rate, on that point I am sure I cannot be deceived?"

"Upon my honour, Miss Acantha, I do think it too bad that a witty clever person, as your friend is universally acknowledged to be, cannot receive a little of that universal esteem, and, perhaps I may add, regard, which is so undoubtedly her due, with-

out subjecting herself and friends to the idle rumours of unconcerned spectators, that there is between them any more tender feeling—a rumour which, I am sure, Lady Sidney herself would never think of authorising. Now, my dear Madam, I appeal to you; do you think that Lady Sidney would for a moment insinuate that I have ever paid her any attention of that marked description to which you allude?”

“No! I am sure she would not.”

“No! I am too conscious that I have never given her the slightest opportunity even for thinking such a thing. This, my dear Miss Acantha, I must confess—and, as it relates to the subject on which I have given myself this morning the delight of seeing you, I will at once frankly own it with that candour which, though it may be extremely foolish, is a weakness into which I cannot avoid being hurried, more or less, at all times, and more especially now—I am sure no man strives more than I do to avoid

giving pain to others, but if I have been so unfortunate as to cause myself to be misunderstood by affecting with great delight — I admit — the witty presence of Lady Sidney, it was because I knew she was the bosom friend of that inestimable being towards whom, however presumptuously, I had deigned to lift my thoughts, and give my whole affections.”

“ Well, but, Sir Simper, don’t you think you could be extremely happy in the society of Lady Sidney, whose praise you sound thus warmly, and, I must also add, not without the very highest reason ; don’t you think, in short, that you might pass your life most happily with a companion to whose excellence your own intellect must make you so fully awake ? ”

“ Madam,” said Sir Simper, with a languishing look and a deep sigh, “ I admit no one is more fully alive to the many excellent qualities of your gifted friend than myself, and it cannot be denied that life might pass

most charmingly in such society; but, alas! the human heart is a wayward and imperious despot, and vain would be all the beauties, the admitted charms of her Ladyship, to one whose whole soul was given to still higher and more commanding excellence in another quarter." This speech was driving matters very close with Acantha, still she pretended not to see its drift, but answered with the archest smile, and an apparent simplicity that nearly drove distracted the admiring though hypocritical swain at her side.

"True, my dear Sir Simper, the heart may have its strong emotions, but it is still the duty of a well-regulated mind to keep these emotions under proper subjection and control; now, with regard to Lady Sidney, I do admit that, perhaps, to a man of your fortune, who might very naturally look for something in return, for you know I am a very business-like body after all, I say then, for a man of your fortune, who might very fairly look for some on the part of the lady,

my friend, Lady Sidney, might not, perhaps, prove altogether such a match as you might desire."

"Ah! Miss Acantha, do you think, for a moment that I would regard fortune in such a matter?"

"You indeed would be a great fool if you did not," said Acantha abruptly, "and what's more, a wondrous exception to the general rule; in the present state of society every one must see that there is a sufficiency of fortune, on one side or the other, before they embark in a partnership, and that for life, which ought, very properly I admit, to have its basis on affection, but which must, of necessity, regulate all its details by the mere question of pounds, shillings, and pence. Therefore, I say, if you do not regard fortune——"

"Well, then, my dear Madam," said the unblushing Sir Simper, boldly interrupting her, and with what degree of truth the reader may judge for himself, "I assure

you I do not regard fortune. No, not in the slightest degree. It may"—and here, as a matter of course, Sir Simper once more laid his hand where his heart ought to have been—"it may be exceedingly foolish of me, and I have no doubt it is the case; it may be exceedingly wrong, but I confess that I cannot, where so vital a matter to human happiness, not only to this generation—is concerned, as the sacred ordinance of marriage; I say, I cannot bring myself to consider that money is a matter which should at all enter into the question."

On hearing this somewhat bold avowal, the reader may possibly ask, "what did Acantha do?" As a veritable historian, I consider myself somewhat in the light of a witness sworn in the box, bound to tell the whole truth, whomsoever it may criminate, and this, therefore, I shall do, and in declaring what Acantha did, although I admit myself to be much shocked, yet, the facts being so, I consider that I have no alterna-

tive but to declare that when Sir Simper made this avowal Acantha coolly uttered a loud and, for a lady, a somewhat prolonged whistle, and straightway walked across the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

“ At Judy Callaghan's door
And this was part of his wailing,
Joe got three pigs and a cow,
Which you may ride astride ;
Don't say nay, charming Judy Callaghan.”

IRISH SONG.

SOME minutes pause elapsed after the original movement on the part of Acantha, recorded in the last chapter, before that lady spoke again ; a smile was seen playing on her countenance as she turned once more towards the Baronet, who, hesitating, and in doubt how the game was running, scarcely knew what line of conduct would be best for himself.

“ Pray, may I ask, Sir Simper, if the lady whose high and revered image has rendered you unable to appreciate all the excellence

of Lady Sidney's charms, happens herself to have any fortune?"

"Yes," said Sir Simper with a deep sigh, "I am sorry to say that is the greatest obstacle in my path; I know the lady in question, unfortunately, has a very large fortune."

"Dear me, how extremely droll; what a remarkable coincidence it is; your late wife, I believe, had a very large fortune?"

"Why, certainly," said Sir Simper, "she did happen to be the heiress of very considerable estates."

"Very funny indeed," resumed Acantha, "you are either one of the most fortunate or unfortunate of men; for, although so nobly despising riches yourself, both your late wife that was, and your new one that is to be, turn out people of very considerable fortune."

"Why," replied Sir Simper, grievously annoyed at this stroke of raillery, "there may appear to be some coincidence in this

fact, but, after all, when you really come to consider the truth, it is nothing more than this, that men of a certain station in society are more thrown in the way of what are called women of fortune than inferior people. But that is all that it amounts to after all."

"Well, Sir Simper, the inference to be drawn from it is a mere matter of opinion; but, tell me, suppose now, since you don't value fortune at all, suppose Lady Sidney's fortune were to be augmented, say by another thousand a-year, should not you think yourself only too happy to secure such a companion for life?"

"Madam, on that subject believe me.—Ah! but I know you are only jesting. It is merely said to try the strength of my attachment to that lady, to whom my whole heart and truth are given."

Sir Simper paused; but Acantha, instead of replying, merely turned towards the window, and remained silent, while the Indian, finding courage, perhaps, in not having to

meet his intended victim's gaze, thus proceeded :—

“Jest, I am sure it is, which makes you contend you are unacquainted with that lady's name; that you do not know all her worth and excellence so entirely as myself I can readily admit; for few of us, if we can believe the proverb, are acquainted with ourselves.” Still Acantha spoke not, nor gave a single glance towards her swain further than to say in a loud voice,

“What a very fine day it is out of doors. Sir Simper, you had certainly better go and take some exercise, instead of wasting this lovely morning.”

Sir Simper was confounded; he hardly knew what course to take. He knew of old that the beauty was a wayward creature; but this determined blindness to his meaning, and the cool way in which it was shewn, utterly puzzled him. Thinking, perhaps, that he himself was not sufficiently warm in his addresses, he rose from his

seat, and advanced towards her, when immediately in possession of her ear, he whispered in very dulcet tones—

“ Do not jest with me any longer, Miss Acantha ; you must, I am sure, fully understand that it is your image I have been so unwise as to set up and worship within the shrine of my innermost heart, and though presumptuous, as I own it to be, to think it possible that you will at present return one-fiftieth part of that passion I bear to you, still I trust, that gifted as you are with such excellent abilities, you will in silence allow me to place, with the greatest deference, before you those grounds on which I have ventured to hope that you will smile on my suit.”

“ Fie, fie, Sir Simper,” said Acantha aloud, “ you know you owe your allegiance to Lady Sidney, and it is scandalous to think that you should come and pay your devours to me as the French elegantly phrase it.”

Whether it was that Acantha's jokes re-assured him, or that he felt anything a relief, in the place of a grave and serious refusal, we know not, but this is certain, the merry mood of his listener extended its contagion to himself, and joining in Acantha's mirth he replied—

“Fie, for shame, to use your friend's name so irreverently as even to appear to think that she occupies the light of a rejected damsel. You must know very well that I never made the slightest overture to her. But tell me, dearest Miss Acantha, will you be serious and listen to what I have to say?”

“Serious, Sir Simper! why, I never jested in my life, unless you mean to call this jesting; and if so, why then, indeed, I never was so serious in my life; but as to listening, what would you have? havn't I been listening to you all the time you have been speaking. Perhaps you would wish me to applaud now and then, as we do at

the Opera. If that will give you any happiness, I will directly."

Still, as Acantha uttered these bitter taunts, and meant them too, she smiled so bewitchingly that the worthy Indian was quite resolved in his own mind that she meant nothing more than to be a little playful with him, and he proceeded—

"I do not, my dear Miss Acantha, pretend, in laying at your feet very humbly myself and fortune, which, for your sake, I could only wish were infinitely greater than they are, I confess I do not pretend that I have the power to offer you youth, and that passionate attachment, which it would be idle to profess, and which often, unfortunately, fades before the bridal clothes are thrown by; but this you can yourself appreciate, that in proportion as the difference of years between us renders the blessing of your hand greater, so in proportion also is the amount of tenderness, and if you will allow me to say it, of indulgence, which a

lady forming such a marriage invariably commands and gains.”

Acantha, who was almost dying for an opportunity of a hearty burst of laughter, still continued to gaze out of the window, and answered not a word, while Sir Simper, taking courage from this tacit sufferance proceeded—

“ There is also another point which will not, I am sure, escape your consideration, the fact, namely, that in maturer life the judgment has gained more stability as the passions have lost intensity, and happiness, therefore, is more frequently found by woman in such a union as I now propose, from the fact of the man’s character being more settled, the rules and principles of action more defined, and certain, as well as more reconcileable to the dictates of good sense, I will not think that you can be tempted by fortune, because, as I have already said,—and pray believe me—I deeply lament that your fortune is already so large as to be the

only matter that fills me with apprehension and dismay in venturing to address you."

At this barefaced assertion, Acantha was scarcely able to keep her countenance any longer; and, indeed, it was only wonderful how Sir Simper could have sufficiently remained master of his own to venture on so audacious and incredible an assertion. However, Acantha did not attempt to contradict it, but only muttered something like,

"Noble disinterestedness."

The Indian went on,

"Still, though I am sure you would not be swayed by any feeling like that to which I have alluded any more than myself, yet it is a happiness for which I assure you I am fully sensible, that while it is one of the highest gratifications of fortune to be able to bestow wealth on those we love, few men, even of exalted rank, have it in their power to exceed myself in such proofs of the devoted admiration I feel for you.

Up to this period, wealthy as I have always been since my return from India, my own taste, it may be foolish and ridiculous to acknowledge it, but as I cannot conceal the folly even if I would, I candidly confess my own taste has always been of that quiet humble kind that I have never lived even at all near to the amount of my income, and that, consequently, from accumulations, the latter now amounts to what might almost be termed a large fortune for a man not in Parliament, nor even very ambitious of finding himself there, unless, indeed, it should be at the desire of one so dearly connected with me that her wishes acquired the force of law."

"Indeed, Sir Simper," said Acantha, "you are very kind to treat me to your whole family history and intentions: very kind, very kind, indeed; a kindness which I am sure, I never can repay."

"Why, my dear Miss Acantha," said the Baronet, "when a gentleman asks of

a lady so great a proof of her confidence as her hand, the least he can offer in return is the most full detail on every point on which she is or can be interested, and therefore, I was just going to observe, that from the circumstances to which I have alluded, the present rentals of my estates are close on twenty thousand a year, a sum that will, and indeed must be, doubled, if not trebled, as soon as the iron mines come into working, an event that cannot now be long delayed."

CHAPTER XIV.

As to be heard wheaer ease is none
As lead to grave in marble stone,
My songe may pierce her heart as sone."

LORD ROCHFORD.

"PATIENCE on me," said Acantha, as soon as Sir Simper had finished his alluding statement, "how dreadful!—how unhappy you must be to have such an odious quantity of money!—Even the responsibility must be sickening. I often debate with myself whether it would not be pleasanter to give up every farthing of my fortune, except about eight hundred a-year, bestow the rest in charity, and thus not only enjoy the delight of seeing the benefit of your generosity while you live, but escape all the vexation and annoy-

ance of property, and the price that in one shape or other, of sorrow and misfortune, all the partakers of prosperity are bound to pay for it. Twenty thousand a year, which might be sixty, and which my fourteen would render something like seventy-four!—Oh! monstrous iniquity! I should almost be afraid of retiring to rest, the mistress of such wealth, certain that some dreadful calamity must await me on the morrow.”

“ Oh, my dear Miss Acantha, such ideas are the mere inexperience of a young girl, even if in uttering them you have the slightest intention of anything but amusing yourself at my expense.”

“ Why, certainly, Sir Simper, a man who has twenty thousand a year is so rich that if any amusement can be made at his expense he ought not to grudge it; but I really wish you would allow some one else besides yourself a little sincerity.”

“ The fact is, though you won't believe it, I never was more sincere in my life, than

when I tell you that I think the responsibility of so much wealth perfectly fearful, and very much to be avoided. Some day, I suspect, when the storm comes to your own door, for hitherto you know, Sir Simper, you have always been a child of the most extreme good fortune; but, some day, when the storm comes to your door, you will agree with me in thinking that those are the happiest who have but a moderate sufficiency."

"My dear, Miss Acantha," said Sir Simper, changing his attack once more, "believe me, if anything could heighten the regard I feel for you, it would be the expression of these noble sentiments, which confirm me in the belief your elevated conduct has impressed upon my mind ever since you were first placed under my guardianship by your lamented uncle; and this makes me more than ever eager to secure, for the delight of my future life, such a companion. You have already had a mer-

ciful deliverance from one marriage, that seemed to offer all the delight of youth ; and, therefore, this may, perhaps, the more induce you to listen to my prayer ; should you do so, I am sure I need not say that on every effort I can make for your happiness, you may most faithfully rely. May I then venture to hope, dearest girl ?” Acantha answered not a word. “ May I trust ?” whispered the devoted swain. Still Acantha seemed equally averse to declaring whether he might trust, or whether he might hope ; and seemed, in sooth, to care just about as much for his doing the one, as the other. Emboldened, however, by the apparent timidity of the lady, Sir Simper leant gently forward, and whispered in our heroine’s ear, “ Dearest Acantha, can you not vouchsafe me the little word, that is capable of establishing all my happiness.” Still Acantha said it not ; and still the absence of any positive denial renewed the Baronet’s courage ; till at length, with all the timi-

dity of a boy of fifteen, who ventured on such a passage, for the first time, Sir Simper dared to clasp the hand of her whom he fondly hoped some day to hail as Lady Wily. Still, although, it is courtesy to say this was done with all the timidity of a boy of fifteen, it must needs be added, that there was in the Indian's manner, at the same time, notwithstanding all his recent professions of love, a further resemblance to the said boy of fifteen, namely, that which we may suppose he would exhibit, when visiting the menagerie, he should be told to touch the paw of the tiger, for that it was too well bred to assail him. With a gentle and slow motion, Sir Simper raised the hand to his lips, and kissed it once—twice—thrice. Still the lady said nothing. Still she did not resist. Surely then it is a matter to excite little surprise, if Sir Simper mistook all this taciturnity for acquiescence, and slowly whispered—

“Since you do not deny my hopes, I

will venture to trust that you will confirm them I will not be selfish enough to ask this confirmation in words, allow me to receive your silence as an assent. You do not answer then?—by that sweet token, I may conclude that your goodness has granted the prayer your excessive beauty has emboldened me to present. Dearest Acantha,” continued the Indian, again, and again, kissing that still unresisting hand, “how shall I ever learn sufficiently to thank you? A life of the tenderest devotion can alone express the sense I shall ever entertain of your goodness. Now only one thing remains to complete my happiness, may I ask, dearest Acantha, when you will permit me to anticipate that all my happiness shall be realised by the gift of your hand.”

“I am afraid, Sir Simper, there is an indispensable obstacle to your marriage,” replied Acantha, who seemed struggling under a wondrous difficulty to preserve her countenance.

“What! what is it!” said Sir Simper, in dire alarm.

“Why, simply this,” replied Acantha, “we cannot be married unless you will consent to run off to Gretna Green.”

“Run off to Gretna Green!!!” exclaimed the astonished Baronet, giving an unusual length between each of the last two words, hardly seeming to believe his senses.

“Yes,” said Acantha, “run off to Gretna Green, didn’t I speak plain enough.”

“Run off to Gretna Green!!” still more slowly than before repeated the horror-stricken swain of fifty-four.

“Yes, to Gretna Green! did you never hear the name of the place before?”

“To Gretna Green?” the Indian continued, seeming unable to get over his entire horror at the proposition.”

“Don’t break your heart, dear swain, it isn’t far.”

“But what, in the name of fortune,

dearest Acantha, should make you think of Gretna Green?"

"Why, of course," said the beauty, pettishly, "you wouldn't have an heiress married at any other place, would you? who do you think could endure it?"

"Endure it," repeated Sir Simper, on whom the proposal seemed to have acted like a perfect estoppel of all reasoning powers; "but what can be your reasons?"

"Shall I tell you, then, Sir Simper?"

"Yes do, pray, before you think of any thing so dreadful as a marriage at Gretna Green.—What can be your reasons?"

"You wish to know, do you? then listen.

"Now, Sir Simper, you say you desire to know my reasons for wishing to be married at Gretna Green?"

"Yes, Miss Acantha, I certainly do."

"Well, now, supposing that I convince you that I have the very best reason for that marriage that ever woman possessed for anything, even according to the admit-

ted acknowledgements of your own sex. Will you promise at once, to yield obedience, and submit to my taste in the matter, without any further debate or discussion?"

"I promise you most sincerely, Miss Acantha, that I will."

"Very well, then, listen to me; I wish to be married at Gretna Green."

Why, now! Why, in the name of fortune, why?"

"Because, oh, penitent Sir Simper! — because I do; and that impertinence of man, which has thought fit to call this a woman's answer, condemns thee, by thy own promise to yield consent without further question. For, lo, have I not given unto thee the very best answer, which, according to the doctrine of men — a woman's weak abilities are able to afford. — I wish it, because I do. So, now, not another word, but perform thy promise, and at once make thy arrangements for the said marriage, at the place aforesaid."

“But, my dear Miss Acantha, do just consider—what will the world say?”

“Sir Simper, I answer you in the words of the poet—‘I have not loved the world, nor the world me, so let us part fair friends.’ I bless my stars, I have no need to consult what the world says, or does, or thinks; I never trouble myself about the world, and if the world is so silly as to pay me a compliment, which I never offered to it, all I can say is, I am the gainer. This I always intend to do—please myself; it strikes me with great force, that in so doing, I shall please the world much more than by attending to anything it has to say. I admire, very much Sir Simper, the fable of the man and the donkey; and, whether I choose to carry my donkey, or allow the donkey to carry me, is a matter about which I shall never consult either Jack Nokes, or Tom Stiles; and when I want their society I can seek it. It may be very wilful and very wrong, and all that sort of thing; but still, you

sec, it's very pleasant, and I am afraid that will be my ruling principle in all such trifling matters as this. Where great questions are at issue, I am quite ready to grant, that flying in the face of society with any effect is hopeless, and generally wrong, for the results that follow, are of proportionable consequence ; but in all trifling matters like the present, even if you do travel a little out of the beaten track, it doesn't—to my mind, very greatly signify ; — you are the party amused — the party amused, is the party generally laughed at : and if he is satisfied, who has a right to complain ?”

CHAPTER XV.

“ And said that my limbs were old !
And that I might not sing of love ? ”

SCOTT.

“ Why, dear Miss Acantha, I assure you these are most eroneous principles to start with in life ; and, consider, this is no light matter—we should be rendered the laughing stock of our neighbours, for the rest of our lives.”

“ But, my dear Sir Simper, that is just the very design I am aiming at ; I hate that dull stupid story of perpetual respect, and so forth, I have had so much of it—I want to get up a good hearty quiz for the rest of one’s life ; and as to being made a laughing stock, why it merely amounts to this—

when people think fit to have a quiz at you, it merely sharpens your wit to return the compliment, and have a little quiz at them, —and thus grows up the charming spirit of repartee. Why, my dear Sir Simper, you are quite a slow man, compared with what you would be, if I had the charge of your education for a few months — don't you perceive?"

“ Dear Miss Acantha, if you only could be serious for a few minutes. If you only would reflect on the position in which your request places me. I, a magistrate! in the Commission of the Peace!”

“ Well, Sir Simper, that's the very thing! I have a great sympathy for lovers, and it is the patronizing by rank and station of a Gretna Green marriage, that would help to take away from it that absurd and most ridiculous prejudice that most people are apt to attach to that ancient and useful institution of matrimony, so admirably illustrative of the common-law of our country.”

“ Well, my dear Miss Acantha !” said Sir ~~Simper~~ Simper, with a desperate sigh, “ you know the weakness of my heart, and folly as it is, I will not attempt to deny it, I have suffered more through life, from my inability to say ~~no~~ to an improper request than from any other cause ; but, in this case, do permit me to enter my protest. You really are not aware what you would be entailing on yourself and me by following up what, I am, 'sure is only a passing whim of the moment. It isn't as if I were a runaway-boy, that might have entered into such a scheme without blame, but, at my time of life, I really should be so exceedingly censured to give my aid to such a project at all !”

“ But, my dear Sir Simper, every one would be sure to know that the project must have originated in my scape-grace notions, and it is I, therefore, who will get the blame, and not you.”

“ But, then, would not that be still worse

of me, dearest Acantha, to shelter myself at your expense?"

"No, I should glory in it," said Acantha, "it would be the very best proof to the world what sacrifices you could make in your devotion, even to my follies."

"Well, but," resumed Sir Simper, "reflect that even in the matter of—" he was about to add settlements, but here the thought suddenly came across him, "absurd as this notion about Gretna Green may be, should I acquiesce in it, I shall escape the necessity of making *any* settlement, and the consequence is, that I shall ultimately get the whole of her fortune at my disposal." Pausing, therefore, for a few minutes just to look at this view of the case again, Sir Simper shrugged his shoulders as he replied—"For my own part I think you are wrong in the extreme to pursue any such scheme, but if pursue it you will, and you think that my acquiescence in such a step, much as my reason disapproves of it,

could be taken as a proof of affection towards you, I at once wave every other consideration."

"Well, then, I shall think it a proof of very great affection; and, if I think so, of course my opinion on that point is paramount."

"Of course it is, Acantha, of course."

"Very well, then, I shall thank you for having consented. But, remember, you are never afterwards to upbraid me, and say that I made a fool of you."

"Can you indeed think so poorly of me, Acantha," replied Sir Simper, "as to imagine that, when once the step is taken, I shall not, if any blame is to fall any where, visit it entirely on myself?"

"Very well, you agree to that, do you?"

"Most unquestionably I do;" and the lover of half a century pretended great indignation at the bare idea of being guilty of the reprisals even momentarily attributed to him.

“Then, that being so,” said Acantha, “I suppose I may now give you my instructions for the elopement. Oh! how charming! how I shall delight in it!”

“Well,” said Sir Simper, with the air of a man who was forced into liking what he knew he ought to condemn. “Now I am fairly in the boat, I admit there will be plenty of fun in the matter too.”

“To be sure there will;” said Acantha, “and now I’ll tell you how I’ll have it managed. You must have the post-chaise and horses ready to night. You don’t object to that do you?”

“Why, no—no, certainly not,” said Sir Simper, who, scarcely able to conceal his delight at being able to get hold immediately of the beauty’s thousands, cared not how soon the affair came off. “No, certainly, if we are to have an elopement, the sooner it takes place the better; for, after all, you know, Miss Acantha, the most absurd part of the matter is, that you have

not the slightest occasion in the world to run away."

"Hush, hush! Sir Simper, we can't go into that matter again, it's all settled you know, and you forget it's all done to please my whim and frolic."

"Well, well," replied Sir Simper, in a tone of the most entire benevolence, "I know it's extremely foolish to enter thus, hand and heart, into these mad-cap freaks of youth, for there is a point at which good-nature becomes criminal; still, I confess, I cannot help it, and so, we'll appoint to-night for our *escapade*."

"Precisely, Sir Simper; and now I'll tell you—for I have resolved the whole thing in my mind—how we will manage it. As I said before, you'll order the carriages to be ready at some given spot, we'll say any turning near the ball-room, where a post-chaise and four in waiting won't excite much attention, and you shall appear in a black domino, with a red cross on the shoulder,

but don't, if you see me in the room, pay me any marked attention, for this will disarm suspicion; but, as the clock strikes twelve, just look for me, I shall be at your elbow, and put your arm through that of the lady's in the pink domino—in the *pink* domino mind—and don't take any lady in my place like a faithless knight, as you gentlemen generally prove to be, or I shall pine and wear the willow."

"Ah!" said Sir Simper, with a languishing look and tone, "would that I could flatter myself that you already felt for me that regard which would induce you to mourn over my loss. But that I know can only be the fruit of years of true devotion to your interest, and then, perhaps, the husband who has proved himself to be your real friend, may hope for this proof of your regard."

"Well, well, Sir Simper," said Acantha, giving him her hand, you must not talk so sentimentally, because you know I am

not, in reality, yet one of the sentimental school, and happen what may to us, I have no doubt that every feeling will exist between us, in due course of time, which may properly belong to our mutual position."

"Oh, no doubt of it, my dear girl—I have not the least doubt of it," replied Sir Simper, little anticipating what that future position was to be, or in any way seeing through the double meaning of that language which, from the first, Acantha had been addressing to him. "You may rely on it, I shall single you out through all disguise," he added, already triumphing in the forthcoming hour, and picturing to himself the delight that was to result from having one of the most beautiful women of the day to adorn and solace what remained of life, and already sharing the triumph which it undoubtedly was at his advanced years to have gained, as he thought, the affections and, as he most entirely believed, at least the hand of the wealthiest heiress in the

county. Indeed, it was his elation, natural enough, however fatal on these points, that prevented his quick sagacity from penetrating the snare laid for him, and certainly with such a pitfall at his feet, no man ever less dreamed of danger. “And now, Miss Acantha,” said he, “have you any more commands for me ; because, as we are to go through this, what shall I call it ?— delightful little romance, the sooner I give the orders necessary for its successful completion the better ; there is yet much to do before we can enjoy the delicious future that is before us.”

“Very true !” said Acantha, I have been wrong to hinder you so greatly ; I think nothing more remains to be discussed between us, except this, Sir Simper, which I shall most indubitably require at your hands.”

“You have but to name your request and gain it,” gallantly said the Indian.

“No,” said Acantha ; “what I am now

going to name is no request, but a command, and look to it that you don't attempt to evade it, or on that very moment I break up our alliance offensive and defensive, and leave you to your fate."

CHAPTER XVI.

'Thou art the wine, whose drunkenness is all
We can desire, O Love!'

P. B. SHELLEY.

"MY dearest Acantha, what can your command be?" said Sir Simper, direfully alarmed.

"Nothing very particular," said Acantha, "or I should not lay such a stress upon it. It is simply this. Fond as I am of fun, remember no one is more entirely devoted to the strict proprieties of life, and though I insist upon your making a runaway match, and, in short, being married at Gretna Green, yet I equally insist that no sort of handle shall be given to ill-natured gossips hereafter against your wife."

“Quite proper, my dearest young lady. Nothing can be more proper,” said the anxious suitor, wondering what was to follow on this exordium.

“Well,” said Acantha, “and therefore I shall insist that you allow the lady’s maid to take a place in the carriage as far as Gretna Green, and that you don’t attempt even to speak one word throughout the whole length of the journey.”

“But my dearest Acantha,” —

“Yes, or no, Sir Simper,” said the peremptory beauty, “if you don’t consent to it, break off the whole of it.”

“But I do consent,” said the alarmed one. “Anything — everything you desire, even though in my own mind I may think it somewhat too exacting.”

“Then break off the whole affair.”

“A thousand sacrifices first.”

“Then you agree?”

“I suppose,” said Sir Simper, with a sigh, “there is no other alternative?”

“No; you are quite right there,” said Acantha, “there is not.”

“Very well then, I agree; but remember, I protest against such a cruel disbelief in my honour.”

“As to your protests, Sir Simper, you know you do not yet sit in the House of Peers, whatever you may do hereafter; so your turn for protesting has not yet fairly arrived; and if it had, I should take no notice of it; and bear this in mind, that if on the journey I find you don’t religiously adhere to the contract, the moment you break through it your chaise will be stopped, the door opened, and you for ever lose your future bride.”

“I will obey you to the very letter. And my dearest Acantha,” said Sir Simper, taking her hand, and gradually encircling her waist with his arm, by which it was evident he was making a motion to steal a kiss, may I for the first time salute you as my affianced bride?”

“Oh, certainly not, by any manner of means,” said Acantha, shrinking back in the most decided style. “I should be perfectly horrified, to say nothing of your being quite in sufficient time when the knot is fairly tied. Oh, you dreadful man! how dare you presume on doing so. Well, your audacity is really frightful. Come, Sir, keep your distance. ‘Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.’ It wasn’t before it was necessary, I fancy, that I thought of placing the maid in the carriage to Gretna Green. Why, you are really dreadful. Talk of poor Pierreponte! Think of the respectful distance at which he, a professed rake, has ever kept himself; and you, who wish to persuade us you are everything that is correct! Well, well, I shall remember this, Sir Simper; fie, fie! Now see that you have everything in readiness and good order; and so, till then, adieu.” And the beauty snatching her hand from Sir Simper’s lips, waved a hasty farewell, and with-

drew the sun-light of her wicked eyes from his deluded presence.

Sir Simper lingered a moment or two after Acantha had left the room, divided between delight at the manner in which, as he thought he had, so entirely made her his victim, and feelings of anger and revenge at the audacious and overbearing manner in which the beauty had dared to treat him.

“I may thank my stars,” muttered he, as he stood in the very act to depart, and yet, half resolutely, gazing from the window. “Yes, yes,” he continued, “let me only once make her tie with her tongue that knot which she cannot untie with her teeth ; and I’ll show her who is to be the real master then ! It’s a thousand wonders to one that I have been able to succeed at so short a notice ; and, indeed, it was a great risk to undertake it, but no other alternative was left me ; for if she had once seen that infernal Pierrepont unfettered, and by some of those wretched accidents

that happen at every turn of life, their mutual distrust had been cleared up — the whole affair might have emerged in an alliance, and my hopes for ever have been at an end. Yes, yes,” continued he, “great as the risk was of such precipitancy, I was bound to encounter it; and the result has justified my anticipations; she is now, thank heaven!”—excellent pious man that he was! —“secured beyond all chance of change, her promise given, it is now too late for her to retract come what will, she is bound hand and foot by a pledge to me, and that was a masterly stroke agreeing to her mad proposal for this run away match; nothing else could have secured me, in common conscience, from making her a handsome settlement. ‘This has been very exciting,” concluded Sir Simper, drawing out his handkerchief, and smoothing the drops from his brow; “but now that this is over, I breathe freely once more. Now, not an instant shall be lost in the accomplishment of my

purpose." Placing his handkerchief in his breast, and fixing his hat firmly on his brows, he quitted the room, and set off at once, to spare no exertion in forwarding the purpose of those whom he most intended to—What?—to ruin!"

Return we now to Lady Sidney.—Acantha no sooner came back to the drawing-room in which she had left her friends, Lady Sidney and Lord George, than the former drew her on one side, and asked in a low tone—

"Well, was I not right, did he not come to make you an offer?"

"You were right, he did."

"And have you acted as we proposed?"

"I have."

"And," said Lady Sidney, with great agitation,"—has he consented to the elopement."

"He has," said Acantha, "and in every manner, precisely as we could wish," she added.

“ Oh ! inimitable,” said the witty widow, “ how strange is the power of that passion of avarice, that can render blind to the most absurd of actions—men at any other moment keenly awake to the slightest impropriety. This, truly, has forestalled all my anticipations ; did I not hear it from you, I could not believe it possible.”

“ Nor I ; but I think I have defined his motive for yielding so readily to the absurd proposal.”

“ What could it have been ? ”

“ Why, it only peeped out from one single word, and that he strove hard afterwards to veil ; so I, of course, did not pretend to have noticed it ; but, I think it has not escaped his calculating avarice—that by running off with me to Gretna Green, he thinks that he will get the whole of my fortune, without being even called upon to make a settlement.”

“ That is it,” said Lady Sidney,—that is it, most undoubtedly ; only think of his

remaining so interested to the very last ; what a thousand pities it is, that this one base quality, should cloud a disposition which might otherwise be so amiable.”

“ Well, on that subject, as I have before said, you must please yourself ; but, I must say, *de gustibus non est disputandum*, and if you can possibly see anything in Sir Simper, which you really can admire ; I most unhesitatingly declare — that your tastes are of the undebateable tribe, and I by no means give in to it. Still, my maxim is, *always* to indulge my friends — not after my fancies, but their’s. If you will take my warning, well and good.— If not, perhaps, well and good still.”

“ Ah, Acantha, you judge too harshly,” said Lady Sidney, “ you have only known him in the odious light of a trustee, where men are very often obliged to play parts not at all in unison with their general nature. This naturally, I admit, turns all thoughts against him. But I don’t despair

of bringing his character out yet in good and fair relief, when the proper hour arrives."

"Ah! my dearest Lady Sidney," said Acantha, "you know yours is a much more amiable nature than mine. You are one of those who contrive to see good in every thing, while I, naughty and impetuous animal, can never trouble myself to go below the surface, and if men don't prove their amiability to me at that point, it's lost for ever to my vision. Now, don't scold, I know it's very wrong, and so forth, but so the fact is, and I fear I shall never have heart to amend myself. Now, then, you know all that has taken place between me and Sir Simper, may I look to you for relieving me from all further trouble in the managing department."

CHAPTER XVII.

“Such shape and image giv’n,
As haunts the unquenched soul.”

CHILDE HAROLD.

LADY SIDNEY having given a full acquiescence to the wish of the heiress, was about to add something further, when a servant entered, and, in a low voice, announced the arrival of some fresh comer.

“Oh! Acantha!” whispered Lady Sidney, speaking to her friend, “here comes the artisté so sagely recommended by Sir Simper to paint you for the small-pox,” and both the ladies, at the idea this presented, burst into hearty peals of laughter.

“Surely,” said the younger of the two, “never was there so absurd an effort of

skill as this with which we are threatened; the idea of one being painted for the small-pox ?”

“What, in the name of fortune, is it you are laughing at so immoderately ?” said Lord George, coming forward.

“What can that matter to you, my dear fellow ?” said Lady Sidney.

“Oh ! not in the least — only if it is a joke, it seems selfish to keep it entirely to yourselves.”

“Well, Miss Curtis, I do admit we are open to this charge ; so, what say you, shall we admit his Lordship into the secret — say, George, dare we trust you ?”

“Why,” replied the youth, “I think you may ; provided the thing be nothing worse than murder and treason, I can contrive to keep it.”

“Well, then,” said Miss Curtis, “most noble of fallers-in-love at-first-sight, and least consistent of human beings, while I go up stairs and prepare for an attack of the most

ravaging complaints, small-pox—weakness of the spine—inflammation of the eyes and redness of the hair Lady Sidney shall explain to you some few particulars of the dark deed we meditate.”

“ Yes ; but ” said Lord George, “ is it ‘ a deed without a name ? ’—because, unless it comes up to that degree of tragic intensity I wouldn’t give one fig to know anything about it.”

“ Then make your mind easy, my Lord,” returned the other, that is, of all things, the very description of our crime—not only is it a deed we should be puzzled to name, if we wished to do so, but even if we did succeed in finding out a name for it, we ourselves should be quite afraid to pronounce it. Is that sufficiently horrible for you?”

“ Why, yes ; ” said his Lordship, “ I think that is such a respectable degree of horror, that I may now entertain your confidence with sufficient zest.”

“ Well, well, that may be so—but all

great generals must now and then sacrifice private feeling to the public weal. We have at present in hand a grand plot, but you must wait patiently until it suits our purpose to give you your cue."

"Yes," said Miss Curtis, "I think we must exercise a little of the vulgar virtue which mortals find so extremely useful and disagreeable, and which we know under the name of patience, and you will be rewarded for it in due time--for truly, though we had rather not communicate it to you at present, we certainly flatter ourselves that we have an inimitable plot in hand, and so while I go up stairs, will you and Lady Sidney amuse yourselves on the lawn."

The worthy couple now sent to recreate themselves on the lawn, had not long enjoyed their walk, when a servant came to announce to Lady Sidney that she was required by Miss Curtis in the library. On hearing this, Lord George immediately took his leave, while his sister repaired

to her friend. On entering the room the mirth of the summoned hostess was excessive. She found the blinds drawn down so as to admit a very guarded portion of light, and Acantha propped in an easy chair, with pillows and footstool, and every appliance that all the idle luxury of an Indian education seemed to render necessary—her face had been rendered so perfectly frightful by art, that not only was it impossible to recognize the supposed Miss Curtis in the frightful representative of the Eastern heiress, but the change was absolutely hideous to look upon ; she wore a green shade—her eyes appeared fearfully inflamed—her back seemed, if not ornamented with a hump, at least so crooked, as to be a perfect deformity, while her face simulated a series of seams and rends, and dried up fissures, from the ravages of that frightful disease the small-pox. Instead of those long and beautifully flowing tresses which had so lately ornamented her finely shaped head, a few thin

straggly corkscrew curls, of the most fiery red, straggled here and there down the pock-marked countenance, which they rendered more than ever frightful. Nor was this all—nothing that marked the real beauty of the true individual—nothing that could for an instant suggest the real cheat was left undisguised. Her feet, clad in coarse black cotton stockings, had been put into a pair of shoes of enormous dimensions for a woman, and these stuffed out to make it appear that even they were too tight, while the thin and delicate ankles of the real girl had been bandaged round until they appeared to belong rather to the cart-horse than to the racer breed. To complete the whole of this metamorphosis, Acantha had practised the disguising of her voice, until it seemed more like the screech of a saw than the full round joyous notes of the sweet toned original.

“ Upon my soul, Lady Sidney, I wish you would learn to shut the door a little

more quickly after you," said Acantha, showing her to what sort of pitch she could bring her pipe when necessary.

"My dear girl," said her friend, "you deserve to be immortalised for the perfect manner in which you have completed your bold design. Poor Pierrepont! he can't fail to be taken in. No being breathing, not in the secret, could possibly imagine who you are; even I, who am in your confidence, feel so utterly bewildered by the change, I can hardly believe it. How have you managed it? Do speak for a moment, Acantha, in your real voice—I can scarcely believe it is you."

"Are you not flattering me, Lady Sidney?" and here Acantha resumed her real voice.

"Ah, now I see it really is you," resumed Lady Sidney, in a manner that at once convinced Acantha of her sincerity.

"Well, this is really delightful!" said the frolic-loving girl, as she became con-

vinced that her disguise was too complete to be penetrated, even by the being whom she not only most loved, but who in reality worshipped her image above that of every creature in the universe. While, however, these felicitations were going on, the sound of voices below announced another arrival. A card was sent up to Lady Sidney; but even before the latter had time to read the superscription, Acantha recognised it, and exclaimed with the utmost glee—

“It is Pierrepont’s; now then for the real fun! Just take one look round me, Lady Sidney, to see that I am quite prepared, and then show in the cruel cousin-refusing monster.”

In conformity with this request, Lady Sidney very carefully made the circuit of her friend’s person; and having failed to espy any defect in her appearance—any crevice in that suit of mail, in which it was her frolic to meet her lover, Lady Sidney gave orders for his admittance.

“ Please, my Lady,” said the abigail, who alone was admitted into the Bluebeard’s chamber, “ the footman tells me that Mr. Pierrepont particularly requested that you would go down, and see him alone, before he came up stairs.”

“ Oh !” said Acantha, with a childish merriment, “ what a most delightful fright he appears to be in—isn’t this charming ? ”

In compliance with his request, Lady Sidney descended to the room below, and there found Pierrepont. He was, as may well be imagined, sufficiently pale and agitated, and was pacing to and fro the room with disordered steps. The moment Lady Sidney entered, he hastened to her side, and clasping her hand warmly in his, exclaimed—

“ My dear kind friend, how much obliged to you I am, for all the trouble you have allowed me to give you in this matter.”

“ Oh ! not at all—don’t mention it,” said

Lady Sidney—her heart really smiting her as she looked at Pierrepont's face, and in those handsome lineaments plainly read the night of suffering through which he must have previously passed. For a moment, treachery to her friend almost lurked in her bosom, as she meditated disclosing to this sufferer the plot laid against his sagacity. A moment's reflection, however, on the near approximation of that high reward which was to atone for this little temporary privation, and the remembrance that Acantha, as her most intimate friend, was still more entitled to her consideration than even Pierrepont, determined her to allow the plot to proceed as was originally intended. "Come, my dear Mr. Pierrepont, don't be so cast down," said the kind-hearted widow, "matters will occasionally run counter; and though this is a grievous trial at first, yet still we must all, in some shape or other, pass over the burning ploughshare; and if such is to be the

penalty of life, why the sooner we pay it the better."

"True," said Pierrepont, with the sigh of a resigned man. "When I remember what a different meeting I once enjoyed in this very house, you must not be surprised at my despair."

"Don't call it despair," said Lady Sidney; remember how many blessings you yet have left to you."

"Yes, yes, I know it," said Pierrepont, his voice thick with emotion; blest with the affection of so exquisite a creature as Ann, the Christian name of the supposed Miss Curtis, "that alone were sufficient to redeem every other ill of life."

"Oh, but not only that, look what prospects you have in your profession; even to-day, I am told, you have gained a most marvellous verdict."

"Yes, yes," continued the mournful Pierrepont, "it is all exceedingly true; but to go through such a scene as awaits

me, and not to confess to you how melancholy it makes me, would be to exist as a creature without feeling. I suppose dear Ann left you this morning, as was proposed?"

"Oh, yes, certainly; it would not have done, under existing circumstances, to have pressed her to stay here to-day."

"No, of course not; and I suppose also, that even now, I can scarcely bring myself to breathe her name, that odious wretch, my cousin, is come?"

"Oh, yes," said Lady Sidney, "she has been up stairs for at least an hour."

"And pray what sort of creature is she?" demanded Pierrepont, Lady Sidney made no reply, but indulged in one of those mute elevations of the shoulders that say so much, and speak so little.

"I supposed as much—is't it horrible?" continued the learned lover.

"Why, dear Mr. Pierrepont, it isn't for me to prejudice you against your cousin,

but it strikes me you'll soon form your own opinion."

"Well, do you know, Lady Sidney, now it comes to the actual point, I do really think I cannot summon courage for the dreadful interview; I cannot tell you how I have been sinking under the anticipation of it all the morning."

"Have you indeed?" said Lady Sidney, with a tone of the utmost compassion, smiling in her own mind to note what a silly child man remains to the last, shrinking from bugbears that exist only in his own brain, and, rushing recklessly into horrors that the dullest dolt might foresee!

"Yes," continued our hero, "now it comes to the point, I really fear, much as this creature wishes it, and bound, as I, perhaps, am, to show her this one mark of courtesy, I really do not think I can summon sufficient courage for this detestable meeting. Could you undertake it for me?"

"I—I face this eastern tiger, this Hin-

dostanee Hippopotamus? No, indeed—much as I confess I will do to serve you in a quiet way, you really are too *exigeant* from your friends; you ask too much. Besides, I don't think it would be right or manly either; and for that reason alone, it would not be fair to allow you to give way to this momentary weakness, for it is no better. On the contrary, take my advice—the boldest and most manly conduct is always the best. If you have decided on refusing your cousin for Miss Curtis, do not, at any rate, mar the generosity of your own act, or take off the value of your sacrifice, in Miss Curtis' eyes, by at all hiding or palliating the motive that has led you on. For my part, I should wish you, when you go up and see your cousin, boldly to confess to her, that you have no heart to give her; and take credit for having acted towards her in a much nobler manner than if, for the sake of your uncle's estate, you had been perjured enough

to swear eternal love and affection to a woman, for whom you could not nurse even the slightest regard. This is the way I think—and although I say it with great humility to one of your superior discernment, still it appears to me, that such is the proper manner in which to meet this emergency.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“ A shrivell'd, lifeless, vacant form,
It lies on my abandon'd breast.”

SHELLEY.

Thus adjured by Lady Sidney,—and she added much more to the same purpose as that recorded in the last chapter, Pierrepoint at length screwed his courage up to the dreadful sticking point—an interview with that lady, an affection for whom was, if he could have guessed the truth, the all engrossing topic of his thoughts. Once or twice, on his way from the drawing-room in which Lady Sidney had received him, to the library in which her freak was proposed to be played off on him, he paused, in hesitation and distress, and renewed his solici-

tations to Lady Sidney to play the part for him. Again, and again, pity for the real annoyance he was suffering strove in the lovely conspirator's breast to induce her to reveal her friend's trick, but fear, at last, prevailed over feeling, though it is hardly fair to use such a reproach, and struggling—protesting—imploring, and still yielding, Pierrepont, was thus led on. At the door of the drawing-room, he once more made a most determined stand for what Billy Lack-a-day calls “*marcy*.” But Lady Sidney now perceived that the worst of his terrors were past, and, at once, ruthlessly throwing open the door, herself announced

“ Mr. Pierrepont ! ”

“ Pierrepont ! ” echoed Acantha, in the harshest guttural she could summon, and, accompanying the word with a most deliberate and atrocious clearing of the throat, which rendered very necessary the use of the pocket handkerchief, a trick, which she knew Pierrepont to hold not very pardon-

able even in a man, and rightly, to esteem in a woman most dire—"Pierrepont," continued the lady, "I think I have heard that name before, some thousand years ago. What Pierrepont is it?"

"Your first cousin."

"What! you don't mean that person at the Bar, do you, whom I came here to see?"

"The same, my dear Madam?"

"Well, I think he has taken his time to come, at any rate," was the rejoinder; "give me my glass, that I may have a look at him."

Pierrepont, on hearing this address, was perfectly thunderstricken; a perceptible shudder evidently ran through his whole frame from head to foot, as he 'gazed on the figure in white,' with its swarthy features frightfully marked from the small pox, bandaged ankles, red hair, and one shoulder higher than the other—which made her appear one of the most disgusting objects, as

he thought, he had ever seen. Meanwhile Lady Sidney, complying with the request made to her, handed down to this inviting person what she called her glass, which was nothing less than an extra size double opera-glass ; but as she gave it into Acantha's hand, she whispered—

“ Take care, you are a little overplaying your part ;” but Acantha was in such high spirits at the success of her stratagem, that she was in sooth not very well calculated, at that moment, for any cool acting. Still Pierrepont was so little prepared for any trick of the kind—the figure before him was so frightful, more especially when his remembrance flew back, as it naturally did, to the elegant and graceful Miss Curtis, whose every movement and attitude was a combination of what has been termed “ poetry put into action :” with this high model, then, in his mind's eye, no wonder that he never dreamed that the deformity, which struck him as being so horrible, was

the very same person. The fact, therefore, of Acantha's overacting, true though it was, was only visible to the eye of her friend, naturally anxious for her success. Pierrepont himself never noticed it ; on the contrary, the outrageous conduct which would, perhaps, have struck an unconcerned spectator only, completed in his mind the utter disgust he felt for the supposed original. When, however, that original coolly commenced eyeing him from top to toe, with the before-named opera-glass, a sentiment of the most intense anger got possession of his mind at being thus criticised, and by such a judge, like an ox in Smithfield and in this sentiment of anger Lady Sidney rightly guessed that the stratagem of herself and friend was safe.

“ Well, Sir,” said Acantha, after a few minutes survey, “ I hope you have not hurried yourself in finding your way to my presence.”

“ Presence!” muttered Pierrepont, “ I

suppose she thinks herself a descendant of the Brahmins at least, as she talks about presence in this way. However, I'll give her a dose before I've done." Then seating himself, before he made any answer, an expression of the most intense loathing and dislike settled in his countenance, as he replied—

"Madam, had you allowed my wishes to have had a little weight in this matter, as well as your own, this most painful interview would have been spared to both of us. It is not, as you must be too well aware, by any volition of mine that we, either of us, trouble each other with a presence that can be certainly productive of no pleasure to you or to me. But since you have thought fit—"

"Stop, Sir," bawled Acantha, "wait, Sir, till you have a Lady's leave to speak, before you trouble me with such a tirade;" then turning like a wild cat to Lady Sidney, "Lady Sidney, will you ring the bell, and

order the servant to come and wheel me nearer to the fire. You stand there—I wish you wouldn't stand there, in that disgusting way, and see me frozen to death."

"No hopes of that," muttered Pierrepont, in a voice so loud that Acantha, who heard it, could scarcely keep from laughing. Then, as soon as the servant came in, the Indian young lady poured forth a torrent of the fiercest invective at having been kept waiting a full minute.

"Good Lord!" muttered Pierrepont, "what a frightful temper; to live with such a wretch!—a man might as well live with a rhinoceros. Not all the fortunes in the globe should tempt me to it." Before, however, he had time to say anything more touching his opinion of his cousin, that sad specimen of an Indian education turned round upon him like a she-wolf who sees her young attacked, and thus began the business of the day:—

"Well, Sir, you may save yourself the

business of all further apologies ; I am thoroughly acquainted with all your past misconduct, and I now perceive that all I have heard to your disadvantage is quite true."

" Madam,"—said Pierrepont.

" Silence, Sir," thundered Acantha. " Where have you learned your bear's manners, to interrupt a lady in the middle of her speech. I tell you I don't want any of your further apologies, so you may spare yourself any of your gratuitous lies; and so, to convince you that I am perfectly acquainted with the history of your past conduct, I may as well at once inform you that I have heard of your debauched mode of life in London, and think it high time that it was put an end to." Then seeing that Pierrepont was making a motion to explain, she added, with a peremptory wave of the hand, " Yes, yes, I know all that you would urge ; but I tell you again, that I desire no lies. Even your looks at this

very moment produce the most irrefragable testimony as to the style of life you have been leading; and to crown it all, I am told that you have thought fit to carry on a most considerable and extensive flirtation with an impudent hussey of the name of Curtis."

"Madam, this is really unbearable. I won't sit still and hear one word breathed against that lady."

"But I say, Sir, you shall sit still, and hear a great deal breathed against that lady, whom I happen to know as an exceedingly frivolous, light-minded, young woman.

"If it were a man that said so,"—commenced Pierrepont; but it was utterly in vain that he attempted to be heard."

"Silence, Sir!" immediately thundered the formidable Acantha. "I won't allow you to dispute my facts on any pretence whatever. Look at the glass, Sir; regard that cadaverous-looking countenance, and ask yourself how with those traces of gross debauch still on you,—your hair almost

uncombed, and your whole exterior slovenly to a degree—you dare present yourself before me to whom, in every sense of the word, your utmost devoirs are due? However, to make a long story short, though I am fully aware how little you merit such grace and favour, still, I have taken your case into my consideration, and so this once shall forgive you. But, remember, Sir, when you are my husband, I shall permit no conduct of the description to which I allude; and to that you may make your mind up,—none of the sort of life you have been leading at chambers up to this period; no parties to unmarried ladies; no flirtations with your Miss Curtis, nor any other penniless impudent husseys who may happen to want husbands, and think you fool enough to supply the place: I warn you, Sir, that won't do any longer."

"Madam, I pray you to hear what I have to say. It would spare you much of this."

"I won't spare you, Sir, and I won't hear

you,” roared Acantha, getting into an absolute storm. “It is quite enough to know that by my uncle’s ill-judged will, whatever your past conduct may have been, *I must forgive and marry you*, I suppose, at last; and, therefore, I may as well do it now with a good grace, as, ultimately, by compulsion. But once more I say, remember, this is the last time. There, Sir, you may now kiss my hand.”

CHAPTER XIX.

“ Perhaps it was right to dissemble your love;
—But why did you kick me down stairs ?”

OLD SONG

As Acantha came to her conclusion, she stretched out a paw that had been dyed perfectly yellow, and under the nail of which a slight shade of Indian ink had been inserted. It is true that she herself did not dare to look towards Pierrepont, as she tendered this disgusting looking object for his homage ; while Lady Sidney, who saw the fingers, and then marked the effect they produced on Pierrepont, found the greatest difficulty in restraining from a burst of immoderate laughter. As for the unfortunate object of all this quizzing, for a few moments he almost appeared as if he must

THE LAWYERS IN LOVE.

either swoon or be sick, and certainly it was not very obvious which of these two unpleasing results would be produced upon him. He looked first in one direction, and then in another, as if plotting an escape from his direful fate, and presently, after turning most exceedingly pale, he at length said,—

“Truly, Madam;”—here, however, he stuck quite fast, and seemed utterly unable to get forth another word, but looked first at the hand, and then Acantha, then at the hand again, and finally at the door, with an expression that spoke as truly as anything short of words could speak—‘would that I could get away.’ Acantha held out her arm till she was quite tired, and then, finding that he made no effort either to explain or obey, exclaimed in her harshest tone,—

“Why, what is the fool staring at? Don’t you hear me, Sir? you may kiss my hand.”

“Madam,” said Pierrepont, getting, if

possible, still paler than before, and at the same time rising and making a most profound obeisance, "It was my wish, if possible, to have spared to both of us this painful, I may well say most painful meeting. But since you have insisted on my waiting upon you, I certainly had hoped that my friends would have prepared you for that decision at which I have no alternative but to arrive; under no circumstances shall I ever feel myself at liberty to claim my share of my uncle's estate."

"What, Sir?"—

"Madam," I have heard you patiently, and you must now do the same justice to me. I wish, with every possible respect, but yet with the utmost firmness, to assure you, that a previous attachment renders it wholly impossible for me ever to contemplate the fulfilling of that portion of my uncle's wishes which related to yourself."

"What, Sir," screamed Acantha, half starting from her chair; "not have me?"

“It isn’t that, Madam, but”—

“But, I say it is that, Sir,” and Acantha interrupted him with a fierceness and an energy that perfectly horrified Pierrepont, unaware as he was, that the whole matter was a mere piece of acting. “I say, Sir,” she repeated, while her eyes seemed to glare with fury, “it is that, Sir, or it is nothing.”

“Pray, Madam, be calm.”

“Be calm! Be calm, forsooth! And shall a ruffian dare to come into a woman’s presence, outrage her best feelings, and then bid her be calm, be tranquil; heed not the wounded pride, feel not the beating bosom, but still, of course, be calm. Oh, yes, of course, be calm. I be calm? I had rather tear my heart out than submit to treatment such as this. Sit down beneath wrongs so deep, and have the rank hypocrisy not to proclaim how deeply I was injured; aye, and to revenge it too!—Be calm! be calm, forsooth! Speak!—tell me, Sir, what woman can

be calm, when a man has the audacity to proclaim to her face that he won't have her."

"I tell you it is not so, Madam. Under happier circumstances I should have been only too proud of the honour which I now forego."

"I tell you, Sir, I don't believe a word of it; and even at this moment I can read in your countenance that you are stooping to a base, vile, lie, which you ought to be ashamed to utter."

"Madam, I will not stoop," said Pierrepont, colouring at the home thrust he had just received; "I will not stoop to retaliate language so coarse and ungentle; my resolve is as fixed as fate. Nothing remains, therefore, for me but to resign to you my uncle's estate, with every wish for your happiness in its enjoyment."

"Enjoyment, Sir! And have you no mockery less cruel than to use such a term to me? What woman could ever enjoy anything after being made a man's public

laughing-stock, by an unqualified refusal?— a refusal, too, under circumstances of more than ordinary disgrace ; since, in order to perpetrate this brutality on me, you must at the same time forego an estate of almost princely amount.”

“ At any rate, Madam, that fact will convince you, there is nothing sordid or mercenary in my conduct ; and ought to procure me at your hands pity and respect, instead of this unjust torrent—of what I cannot but call unlady-like abuse.”

“ Respect ! I treat with respect a man who has intentionally gone out of the way to wound me, on the very tenderest point on which a woman can be made to suffer. No Sir, know me better ; nothing you can ever say, shall win such a feeling from me.”

“ You need not trouble yourself Madam, I no longer value it. Respect, to be worth acceptance, should come — not from the hands of the violent and intemperate, but

from those whose respect is really worth having—the amiable—the wise—the reasonable of mankind.”

“ That’s right Sir, pour on, I will endure ; add insult to injury, it is well worthy the rest of your conduct. It will then be all of one piece. But I know to what source to attribute the whole of your proceedings of to day ; that deceitful wretch Miss Curtis, is at the bottom of it all. But now, I tell you—she shall never get you from me. No, never. Mark my words, Sir, I will have you in spite of yourself. You shall marry me, if there be either law, or lawyers in Great Britain.”

“ Madam, ” said Pierrepont, looking round for his hat in the greatest indignation, “ I despise your threats, and feel as much scorn for your boasted power, as Miss Curtis may entertain contempt for your slander. I am sorry to use language so stern to any one bearing the name of woman, but you, yourself, have left me no

other alternative ; and, as far as the law goes, no one can know better than I do, in what I am amenable to that, and how vain are all your menaces. If you entertain a different opinion, make your attempt. In this unpleasant scene which you have forced upon me, I have wished to spare you every unnecessary pain. But, since you will not allow any one to treat you with the tenderness they desire, I now take leave to tell you, that you have most unjustly spoken of the lady, whom you can *only* by any possibility underrate—from your total want of any opportunity to ascertain her matchless worth.”

“ Oh dear ! is it come to that,” said Acantha, with a most annoying toss of the head, that put the last seal to Pierrepont’s wrath.

“ Yes, Madam,” said he, “ it is come to that, and still more ; for since you thus dare me to it, I will frankly tell you—that, were Miss Curtis wholly out of the ques-

tion, no inducement on earth, should ever lead me to unite my lot with yours."

"What! What," shrieked Acantha—the scream of her voice appearing to rise still higher at each additional word. Oh, Sir Puppy, then I am to gather, am I, that the personal deformities that Heaven has pleased to afflict me with, have led you thus to trample me under foot; and, that Miss Curtis has, after all, been a victim like myself; and made, on this occasion, the mere stalking horse of your vanity, to enable you to refuse a woman less good looking than yourself? A pretended cause for your refusal, that does not really exist?—the true motive of which, I now perceive, I am to trace to those infirmities with which Heaven has been pleased to afflict me."

In vain, at this juncture, did Pierrepoint endeavour to interpose his protest, and to declare, that Acantha was arguing upon premises that had never been grant-

ed; he might as well have tried to catch the falls of Niagara in a salt-spoon, or to dam up the lava of Mount Etna with a sheet of brown paper. On, the resistless torrent of the lady's eloquence still rolled, apparently more furious from the futile effort made to suppress it.

“ Yes, yes,” the lady continued, as if quite convinced by her own rhetoric, “ I see plainly it is so ; and thus, because I have not been formed in quite such a poppinjay mould as yourself, I am to be ruthlessly trodden into the mire. A fine manly heart you must have, truly Sir, to reproach an unhappy woman with those misfortunes, which make her life a daily and an hourly curse to her.”

Here, to complete the matter of her distress, Acantha thought the best moment presented itself for a violent burst of tears ; and, accordingly, she indulged Pierrepont in such a waterspout, or rather—taking the sobs into account—such a hurricane as it

had been rarely his lot to encounter in life before.

When Pierrepont beheld the effect which this scene had on Acantha, he became absolutely frightened at his own responsibility; and having some indistinct sort of fear that he might yet be compelled to give up his lady-love, and marry, whether he liked it or not, the horrid object before him, this feeling, operating strongly on his mind, induced him at once to try and moderate the heiress's grief. Moreover, it is but fair to admit, that Pierrepont was a person of tender and humane feelings; and not all the wrath he entertained for the calumniator of Miss Curtis, could make him an indifferent spectator of the agony of another—still more so, when that agony was caused by a decision of his own—even although he did strongly condemn and reprobate the sufferer's whole course of conduct and action.

Though a deformed woman, and though

an ugly woman, and though it could not but be admitted also, which was much worse than all three, a vile-tempered woman, still, his persecutor was a woman, and, as such, entitled to all the reverence man could offer. No sooner did Acantha's tears begin to flow, than Pierrepont at once melted.

CHAPTER XX.

“ And well she acted o’er the part
That Love first taught a broken heart.

“ My dear Madam,” said Pierrepont, reseating himself, though not very near his cousin, “ how you can have so far mistaken me, as to imagine that I, for an instant, intended to reproach you, or that I could so act to any fellow-creature, from the mere influence of any of those dispensations with which it pleases Heaven to try humanity, I know not. Nothing was ever further from my heart—nothing could possibly be more brutal than such a course.”

“ Amen !” sobbed Acantha, plying her handkerchief.

“No, Madam,” resumed Pierrepont, in a most soothing tone, which soon appeared to work wonders. “There is a balm for every bruised heart ; and never yet, I am sure, did the Lord of life afflict any of his creatures, in any manner whatsoever, without, at the same time the blow was struck, some healing touch was also given. You, perhaps, imagine I referred to that subject of grief to which you have alluded, because it is very possible that you may be more than usually sensitive to sorrow on that head ; but when you are inclined to grieve for such a cause, or to fancy that slight is put upon you for it, you should remember how many blessings you have showered upon you, as compensation for any ills peculiar to your individual lot. Contemplate those blessings, and I am sure you will soon cease to let those tears flow on. Look, in the first place, at the enormous wealth to which my determination leaves you, with undisputed title ; and, from that

alone, see what opportunities of happiness you can command ; for wealth, well used, confers the dearest luxury that Heaven can yield—the sacred joy arising from creating, and sharing, the happiness of others !”

“ Then, if you thus think, Mr. Pierrepont, why will you not direct that wealth, and share that joy, with me ? If human infirmities are not the fault of the poor wretch that they afflict, then why cast me off ?”

“ Madam,” said Pierrepont, with an expression that showed he well knew the dangerous nature of the ground he was now approaching, “ my words did not go near the meaning which you have attributed to them. Human infirmities take a much larger field than those mere matters of person, to which you first alluded. There are deformities dependant also on ourselves, for which we who make must alone answer ; deformities of mind and temper, far worse, in my view, than any other. It may be

true, that we cannot quicken this breathing form ourselves, and so the fashioning of its shape is not a matter dependant on our will ; but that which is worth more than all the beauty on which human eye ever revelled—that soul which is to endure beyond its fading tenement of dust—that genius which, by its excellence, is to render us immortal, or by its weakness permit us to be forgotten—that temper which must prove to us either a blessing or a curse—these are matters which the feeblest and the poorest can regulate. A few brief years, and the mere accidents of form and beauty are, by the equal and unsparing hand of Time, reduced to the same level of decrepitude and grey hairs ! A few years more, and the loveliest princess and the most loathsome beggar—the most elegant of monarchs, or the most unsightly of slaves, presents the same revolting mass of defecation—where not the mothers that nursed them could detect one from the other. How easy, then, is it to set

too high a value on the possession of beauty, or its denial—a matter for which we are entitled to little praise, since we gave it not to ourselves; and for the absence of which, therefore, we still less deserve censure, since it was not forfeited by our own misdeeds. Not so the manner and the mind! None, till they essay the effort, can even guess the vast extent to which all who please may improve these! None, till the last trump shall sound, can say through what enduring ages the good steward of the five talents may be permitted to enjoy those capacities and amiabilities which he has sedulously cultivated and improved! Here, in truth, lie those deformities or excellencies of our being, for which we ought to be blamed or praised, and which, in the strictest sense, constitute an object worthy of the highest ambition. Ask then yourself, what wealth, what fortune, nay, even more, what genius itself, can ever render sweet, a bitter temper or a tainted mind?"

“Stay! stay! I implore you!” sobbed Acantha, much moved by the discourse of Pierrepont, “believe me, in all truth, that you have wronged me much—the hasty language I have uttered even now, I see the folly of and repent. Your better education—your constant intercourse with the world have taught you much—but oh! you cannot know—you cannot imagine the bitter agony that woman endures whose love is spurned! do not, I beseech you, do it. Faults! yes, I have too painfully well known—Thus begun the cure, it only remains for you to follow the hints you have given, to witness their removal, but do not forsake—do not reject me! think of the pain, the shame, the ruin, the despair of refusal. Ah! vain concealment of my fallen pride!—and vainer still!—assumption of a wrath I could not feel! Must I at last confess the bitter truth? I loved you, Pierrepont, before I even knew your form further than it was revealed to me by this most inefficient por-

trait." As Acantha said these words, she drew from her bosom an exquisitely painted miniature of our hero excessively like himself, and evidently, from the gold setting in which it was mounted, one that must have been worn constantly in the sacred depository from whence it was produced. Between pity, horror, and surprise, Pierrepoint was almost speechless. He looked at the portrait, then at the wretched girl that held it out, a perfect antidote to love, and then at the portrait again, until he scarcely knew what to think or how to act.

"A portrait, and of me?" he at length stammered forth, "In what bitterest hour of misfortune was it drawn, and what accumulated horrors and agony was it not doomed to heap upon the head of its luckless original!"

"Nay! I beseech you, say not so," continued Acantha, "you little know the hours of enjoyment—whether real or imaginary, based on substantial grounds or a mere flit-

still believe in your feeling of justice, that you will not utterly throw off as unworthy of regard, that prayer which has been made to you by the dying lips of a beloved relative, who has proved his deep devotion for your happiness, by bestowing on you all the wealth that he possessed? You do not answer! Is there no hope left for me? Me who am blessed with such an intense love of all that is beautiful and fair, and from that very feeling, the more deeply curst with the maddening knowledge of my own hideousness? Oh, tell me! tell me! I implore you—has Heaven vouchsafed to this anguished-stricken mind no compensating gifts to win a heart that's won and broken mine?"

"Nay, wrong not your nature by such a thought," replied Pierrepont, half-distracted by witnessing so much distress caused by himself, and which he yet knew himself to be wholly unable to relieve.

Acantha seemed at once to detect the

advantage she had gained, and at once pursued her course more determinately than ever. Claspng his hand, while an icy chill shot through his frame, she exclaimed—

“Oh! yes, it must be so. It is the great universal law throughout all nature. Even you yourself alluded to it but some few minutes since. Turn where we will, we see it illustrated in the very meanest animals, and shall the unfortunate Acantha be the only exception to this great rule. The softest gem which beauty borrows for delight, dwells in a form mis-shapen and perilous to find. The sweetest perfumes that enchant our sense, come from mere weeds and least pretending flowers; nay, the poppy, humble though it be, can yield to suffering and disease, the choicest drop of Heaven’s love—while even the hump-backed camel renders life on deserts, that else were death to man.”

“Do, in mercy, spare me, Madam,” said Pierrepont, “and remember, that though I

may not be able to meet all your wishes, still I suffer like other men. I have not the privilege which you seem to suppose I possess, of being carved from stone ; believe me, if I had the power, no one would more readily contribute to your happiness than I."

" Say not so, no one can have the power more completely than you now possess it. Only listen to the request of your generous and dying uncle, and love, depend on it, will soon spring up to reward those qualities which your very kindness will call forth. Make but this effort, and believe me Pierrepont, not even my hump-backed fellow sufferer shall proffer man a dearer fount of living water, than thy wife's enduring heart shall bear for thee over this aird waste of human suffering. Do ! do ! have pity on me !"

" Would to heaven that I could, Acantha," said Pierrepont, little dreaming of the farce that was being played off on him, and touched to the heart by the earnest way in

which his cousin implored him to the step that she desired, notwithstanding the evident absence, on her part, of that womanly delicacy which he, like other men, considered the most desirable quality in any one who was, hereafter, to become his wife. “Would that I could!” he exclaimed after a pause of several seconds, “but, believe me, I say it in the deepest grief, it is utterly—utterly impossible.”

“What then, is it indeed true, that you are—that you do”—and here the agony of the moment seemed too great to allow Acantha to find utterance for her words; till, at last, with a vehemence that fully expressed how deeply she felt what she was obliged to utter, she rapidly exclaimed:—“It cannot be possible that you really and truly, beyond any pretence, love another!” Pierrepont answered not a word, he thought that was the most humane, as well as one of the surest modes of conveying intelligence of the fact which, disguise it as he would, must

ultimately appear in all its intense bitterness, and he judged rightly. Looking at his frigid lips, and cast down eyes, intensely for a few seconds, the beautiful hypocrite added, in a tone that admirably sustained her part, "That silence is my doom!" and with a convulsive scream, fell fainting back in the chair from which, in the excitement of the moment, she had partially risen.

CHAPTER XXI.

“ Turn, Angelina, ever dear,
My charmer turn to see ;
Behold thy long-lost Edwin here,
Restored to love and thee.”

GOLDSMITH.

“ **HELP !** help ! oh, help me, Lady Sidney,” cried Pierrepont, instantly recovering all his energy as soon as he beheld the fall of Acantha, and darting forward to her side, but Lady Sydney was already before him. During the whole of this absurd piece of acting, she had been seated, agreeably to the promise made to Pierrepont, in the bow-window of the library, and on the first alarm of the fainting fit, for which she was fully prepared, she darted forward, and was soon by Acantha’s side. Seizing a tumbler of water, she dashed a large portion of it into Acantha’s face, and said to Pierrepont—

“Run to the window for my smelling salts.” Pierrepont ran off towards the spot. As he did so, Lady Sydney applied a handkerchief, very freely, to Acantha’s face, and then drew up the venetian blind with which the room was darkened. While Acantha herself raised her hands to her head, and when Pierrepont turned round, his bewilderment and surprise may be easily imagined, when he beheld, standing before him in the die away, despairing, love sick and hideous cousin Acantha, the fair conqueror of his own heart, the arbitress of his own destiny, the elegant, the accomplished, the beautiful Ann Curtis, holding in her hand, as the final proof of the somewhat severe hoax she had played off on him, those odious red ringlets, which but a few minutes since appeared to be the sole growth of her well turned head. Lady Sydney, in that brief space, had most effectually removed the painting from Acantha’s cheeks; and, instead of the frightful, and seamed Indian,

there now beamed before him the transparent and delicate complexion that at first fascinated his gaze in the supposed friendless orphan.

“Can I?—may I?—dare I?—believe my own eyes,” said he, “that Acantha, and my own Ann Curtis, are one and the same person?”

“Sir, they are,” said Acantha, bowing.

“How could you play me this cruel trick?”

“How did you dare, Sir, to send Lord George Dunvext down here to marry your cast off heiress, Acantha? answer me that.”

“Why,” said Pierrepont, not a little confused at this recrimination.

“You may well look guilty,” she added, witnessing his confusion.

“Well, then,” said he, “I plead it too, and trust to your forgiveness. But are you really my cousin Acantha? or is this merely some other hoax which you are playing off on me?”

“ Mr. Pierrepont, I am your real, true, and, as you lawyers say, *bonâ fide* cousin Acantha—of that I give you due and particular notice, and advise you to act accordingly; and possessing, moreover, more wit than a certain relation, I chose to see and judge for myself. A certain youth thought fit to give his heart to a certain penniless Miss Curtis; and now the rich, the cast off”—

“ Heiress,” interrupted Pierrepont—

“ Rewards him with that pearl beyond all price—her own.”

And, in his turn, Pierrepont too darted forward, as Sir Simper had done before him, to take some little instalment, before it became rigidly due.

“ Come, Sir,” said Acantha, “ no more of your fine phrases to me. My whole soul must now be devoted to revenging our mutual wrongs, on that sweet confessor of every virtuous feeling, Sir Simper Wily. In due time you shall be let into the whole

scheme, which, we flatter ourselves, is not a very bad one for the purpose we mean it to answer ; and so, till the fruition arrives, we bid you farewell ;” and Acantha, waving an adieu to her lover, before he could yet recover from the surprise of her identity, in a few moments more left the room, to efface from her person all further traces of that perfect disguise, which had so fully answered the frolic aim with which it was adopted.

To attempt to describe the joy which filled Pierrepont’s breast as he cantered back from the house of Lady Sidney to his lodgings, would be almost vain. The felon reprieved from death might give one some faint notion of the ecstasy, but the excitement in that case would be too much deadened by the influence of fear. A poor gentleman suddenly left a large fortune might have experienced some of his joy, but here the intoxicating and brilliant effects of love would be unknown, and surely any one who

has ever felt that madness in its intensity needs not to be told that no other emotion of the heart, however near it may approach, can in reality be confounded with it. He, who but a few minutes since, was so full of despair that many a man has applied his brains to that worst of purposes—blowing them out upon slighter grounds, now seemed to feel that the whole universe contained for him but one entire atmosphere of light and joy; and mingled with this arose that feeling which so particularly marks the existence of true love in the human heart, a sense of charity and benevolence to all mankind. He had previously agreed with one or two of his brother barristers to dine at the mess, but now joy had completely taken away all appetite for food, and he knew, moreover, too well, that if, in his present state of mind, he shewed himself among his brethren he should be unable to help committing some extravagance which would be drawing their attention upon him, and excit-

ing inquiry and laughter. Returning, therefore, to call at his lodgings, he ordered a solitary dinner, and, after musing on his mistress' fair face, vowing that she was lovelier than ever, and committing a thousand other acts of moral insanity, for which men in love have ever held, under Cupid's seal, a patent of perpetual pardon—he finally indulged in a most hearty laugh at the trick that had that day been played off against himself; then began to consider what further work remained before him for the rest of the evening, and, in vast assistance of this consideration, in came a dispatch from Lady Sidney. Tearing it open, with the utmost anxiety, he read, with great delight, these words:—

“Lose no time in hastening to the masquerade ball in the following dress; we have perfected our plans, and as soon as we see you, you shall have the whole details. Your domino must be black, with a white *fleur-de-lis* on the right shoulder. You will find me, wearing a green domino, and without a mask.

Take care to wear a close mask yourself, and to speak to no one until we meet. Be sure that you enter the room precisely as the clock strikes twelve. It is unnecessary for me to add more to this cheering intelligence, than that the enemy has not the least notion of our designs against him ; don't fail at the appointed hour, and leave every other minor arrangement to us.—

“ Your's, in haste,

“ SIDNEY DUNVEXT.”

Now, although it is true that this intelligence still left our hero entirely in the dark as to what this new caprice might be, he had yet that entire confidence in Lady Sidney to feel certain that she would be sure to raise no hope which she could not ultimately and most fully realize ; so instantly procuring the disguise required he, at the hour appointed, sallied forth, dressed precisely in the manner ordered, and first entered the Masquerade Ball room. Here, as he had expected, he found assembled a

vast concourse of revellers, wearing every sort of guise and livery ; while motley characters of all sorts, attempted, though not very successfully it is true—to keep up the fun and mind that originally made the Masquerades of Venice so celebrated. As he wandered through the merry group, he naturally looked for his friend and co-conspirator, and soon had the satisfaction of spying out Lady Sidney, by the cognizance which she had communicated to him.

CHAPTER XXII.

“A sort of a Ridotto. ’Tis a place
To which I mean to go myself to-morrow.”

BYRON.

“Now,” said Lady Sidney, “I will show you some good amusement; come with me.” Accordingly, taking him a few feet further on, she pointed out to him Acantha, in a pink domino, with a large white cross on it, talking very busily, and apparently with great delight, to Sir Simper Wily. The heiress had no mask on, and seemed to be imparting intense delight to the learned Baronet, by her jests and witticisms of all kinds, which she was freely passing on every one around her. A little further on, Lady Sidney once more squeezed his hand;

and when he looked up, there was his own chum and friend, Lord George, playing the most desperate game of flirtation with an elderly damsel, that seemed at least old enough to be his mother, his Lordship being dressed in the uniform of the Life Guards, and the elderly lady apparently the most delighted creature it was possible to conceive. Having thus shown him their various friends busily at work, she took him on one side to communicate to him his share in their general campaign, to which Pierrepont having given a most patient hearing, and entire approval, he promised his utmost assistance in the developement of its results ; and now it is for us to see how far these promises were carried into effect.

As the clock struck one, the grand supper-room was thrown open, and a great rush of the whole company was made towards the edible department ; while the mass of selfishness was devoted to its own gratification, and little obtained attention,

save cold fowls, tongues, &c., various little groups of dominos, two's and three's, and so on, might have been seen leaving the ball-room, had there been present any one with attention sufficiently disengaged to admit of observation. This, however, was not the case; and among the rest, Sir Simper Wily, at last, had the pleasure of bearing off his coveted bride in the pink domino with a white cross.

“Now, dearest Acantha,” muttered he, “we must lose no time; lean upon my arm. Where’s your lady’s maid? Oh! there, I see her. Ah! here comes our carriage—wrap yourself closely up;” and his companion following the prudent exhortation here given, did accordingly wrap herself closely up—very closely. Sir Simper handed her to the carriage-door, and then handed in the detested lady’s-maid, who, as he thought, would at least have had the decency to have taken up the nearer corner, and left the middle seat for him, next his

lady-love. As, however, she had not the good taste to do this, but took up the coveted position herself, Sir Simper, who felt that time was precious, thought it unwise to say anything about it at that moment, and, therefore, gaily leapt in after the lady, bid the post-boys drive away, and then, sinking back in the carriage, muttered to himself—

“ I think this matter has been managed rather cleverly.” Placing his hand very gently behind the lady’s-maid, who sat very forward, the fingers of Sir Simper sought out the fingers of Acantha; and giving a gentle clasp to the fair hand he thus obtained, he felt his blood dance with an exulting thrill through his bosom, as those taper fingers returned the tender pressure; and heartily wishing the lady’s-maid at the bottom of the Styx, he remained leaning back in the chaise, and marvelling, complacently enough, on that strange inconsistency in woman’s nature, which could induce Acan-

tha so readily to abandon her young cousin for a man like himself, who was nearly twice her age.

Leaving him to solve this riddle at his leisure, if he can, we will now turn to another part of our story, and witness the departure of a second chaise. This, which was drawn up at some distance from that of Sir Simper, was likewise hurried onward by four horses, into which was handed the fond and fair, but we fear not over-prudent, Circumspect, by the charming Life-Guardsman, in whose warlike habiliments she seemed to read every possible promise of happiness.

“Now, my dear Lord George,” she whispered, as in the deep shadow of the high building, she paused for a moment on the step of the vehicle that was for ever to rescue her from the reproach of spinsterhood, “are you sure, love, that these horses are quite safe?”

“As the Bank,” was the subdued reply, which being accompanied by a tender kiss,

was of course, deemed unanswerable; and in plumped my Aunt Circumspect, and down she sat. The Life-Guardsman dressed in his martial cloak, whispered a direction or two to the post-boy, jumped in gaily after her, and away for Gretna Green rolled they. One fool making many, is, of course, too old an adage to require much repetition, and strange to say, it did occur, both to Sir Simper and my Aunt Circumspect, before they had been long upon the road, that they were both pursued. My Aunt Circumspect, imagining it was by her enraged brother; and Sir Simper, conceiving that his pursuer was no less a person than Pierrepont; however, whether these suspicions were right or wrong, yet remained to be developed. Sir Simper's carriage arrived at Gretna, in perfect safety; and now," said he, "I defy—not only master Pierrepont, but all the squad of the Court of Chancery combined.

He did, it is true, observe some horses,

which appeared to have come in recently like his own; but in a place like Gretna, this excited little attention; and being shewn into a room, where the light of a candle scarcely dispelled the darkness of the morning, he requested that he might immediately see the supernumerary priest of Hymen, whose services were in such request. Being told to take a chair, he hastened to congratulate his bride; the lady's maid informed him, that her mistress was very faint; he thought perhaps, it would be wise to have recourse to the delicacy of leaving his future wife and her servant together, till the moment arrived for binding his victim irretrievably to his side. Just as he was going out of the door, to his consternation, a number of other people, all variously disguised—and whom he could almost swear, he had seen at the masquerade he had just left--were shewn into the room, followed by the worthy man whose priestly assistance they required.

“ Very odd,” muttered Sir Sinper, “that these people from the masquerade, should have taken the same opportunity as myself of running off here.” It then occurred to him, that such an assemblage was one, which not only held out the best opportunities for elopement ; but, being of rare occurrence, and long notified as forthcoming — was, of every rendezvous, the one most likely to have attracted the regard of run-away couples ; and so fixed the attention of all elopement - mongers for some weeks, if not months past. Then again, it also occurred to him, the distance from the ball to Gretna being so short, and the confusion of such an assemblage—all in masks and dresses so great ; these were marvellous points for the consideration of all young gentlemen, who had to fee the rapacity of post-masters on the one hand—and elude the vigilance of mammas or guardians on the other ; and, being moreover, more engrossed with his own matters than

their's, his chief thought was, whether any persons present were likely to recognize him; and, if so, what consequences were to be feared from such a recognition. On these points, however, his cares were soon set at rest, when he remembered that the other parties must all be here on business of their own, on which they would, doubtless, be too much engrossed to pay any attention to him. The only person he had much cause to fear; was Tierrepoint, and he was sure not to be here, inasmuch, as he had no body to run away with; as for any one else, with a friendly ward, there could be, of course, no need of apprehension; and, at the most, things had now gained a crisis, at which it didn't become very material, whether any of the parties arriving knew him or not. However, it certainly was very disagreeable, to be thus publicly paraded; and going up to the North countryman, who was to conclude what he had so auspiciously began, Sir Simper said—

“ Is it not possible, my good friend, to accommodate my party with a room to ourselves ?”

“ What, would you think ” was the reply, “ Englisher, that ye are, if five couple were to be married at the same time in your ain country, each asked for a separate kirk ?”

“ I beg your pardon, Sir,” said Sir Simper, “ I was no^t aware that this was the room iⁿ which we were going to be married. Are all these people going to be married too ?”

“ Aye, mon,” was the answer.

“ And, pray, how long before that takes place ?”

“ The noo,” was the reply.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“ Sure marriage is just like a Devonshire lane,
For tis narrow and long, and when once you are in it,
It holds you as fast as a cage does a linnet.”

DR. MARRIOTT.

SIR SIMPER shrugged his shoulders, and seeing how little was to be made of the priest, fell back to the position to which the latter motioned him, and where his companions in matrimonial joy were already forming a circle. The queer deputy of Hymen seemed to understand perfectly the feelings and necessities of those about him, for one of his very first acts was to remove to the farthest possible distance even the solitary taper that had hitherto shed its faint light on the proceedings of the morning. The confidence thus produced among these loving valentines was wonderful, Sir

Simper among the rest ; and though it is true, not a word was spoken by way of general conversation, each gentleman whispered his lady, and the whole of them took courage to approach within a few yards of each other. Meanwhile, the Blacksmith, who was—one would think, by virtue of his office—a little lame of one leg, hobbled about in the most classical manner, until he had succeeded in placing all his clients at linkable distances, and in pairs, one here, one there, and one in the other place, grouping round the end of the large room in which they all were, he himself standing at the bottom, the mighty wizard of the lot, and forming, as it were, the pivot on which they in a semicircle turned. Up to this period he had done his spiriting gently ; in other words, he had gone about in silence, poking one, shoving another, and hustling a third unfortunate couple, until he had got them all into their right places. Muttering half audibly at last,—

“What day is this in the calendar, I should like to ken, that brings so many files of one mind together?”

That men who do not live by our follies should call us fools, is all fair, and quite in the way of business; but that those who hold their very existence by our weaknesses should think themselves at liberty to condemn them, is rather too bad. A great deal in estimating the amount of human folly depends upon this important question, whether that which we note is a folly on which the observers are individually interested, in this case absurdity may reach a surprising height before it is detected; but if we look on upon the foolery which makes us no individual return, how inexpressibly ludicrous it instantly becomes even in the eyes of the least observant and acute. If any third party could have seen the group we have been describing, assembled in the long room at Gretna, on that memorable day which witnessed the events we are nar-

rating, he would have found it extremely difficult to have kept his mirth within any sort of just bounds at the spectacle that there presented itself. The long dark space revealed by the faintest glimmer of light that could make things visible, the anxious groups of pale jaded faces, disguised in holiday suits, and all of them speaking just below their breath, in a sort of mysterious mumble, the lame Blacksmith limping too and fro among them, incantations as if in some sort of conjuration to himself, and each one stealing, every now and then, furtive glances at his neighbour, all apparently as eager to pry into the secrets of others as to conceal their own. — These various concomitants and peculiarities of the scene would have rendered it sufficiently laughable, independent of that most ludicrous feature completing the climax of absurdity, namely, the grave and excited devotion which marked the manner of all around, and plainly declared that the mum-

mery now proceeding about them was, at least, to the feelings of the actors, and, perhaps, truly enough, one of the most important scenes in that sad farce of life in which we are all called to suffer and to play.

“A pretty temple this for Hymen to be worshipped in, dearest Acantha,” muttered Sir Simper to his fair conqueror; a deep sigh was the only response.

“Lean on me, dearest,” said the sensitive lover, thus answering this tender claim on his protection; a command which was immediately complied with; while Sir Simper added, by way of consolation, “Disagreeable as this ceremony undoubtedly is, there is at least this comfort for us, that not St. George’s, Hanover-square, could bind us more irrevocably to each other.”

There was no time, however, for the exchange of much sentiment, for, at this crisis, up came the lame officiator.

“Have ye got any wedding gyves?”

said he, addressing himself to a couple that stood next Sir Simper.

“What are they, Sir?” demanded the lady, in a timid voice.

“You Englishers call them wedding-rings.”

“No, then, Sir, we have not,” was the whispered reply. On which the Blacksmith drew forth a box well furnished with these indispensable commodities, and tendering it to the gentleman at her side, he in silence selected and fitted one of the proper dimensions, and then stood back as if that part of the business were over. Not so, however, the priest, who remarked—

“Ye maun na put it on the ledly’s hand just yet; bide awee, till she is your wife; and between whiles, ye’ll be paying me seven guineas—five for the wedding, and twa for the ring.”

“This fellow knows how to indorse his own brief very decently,” muttered Sir Simper. The strange gentleman thus taxed

made, however, no comment, save the wise one of paying down the money ; after which the Blacksmith passed on to the next couple. They also, it seems, had forgotten to provide themselves with the necessary circlet of gold, and paid the penalty by being obliged to take one of the Blacksmith, at about nearly five times the price that it originally cost. However, they wisely said not a word ; the ring was fitted, the fee paid, and the Blacksmith passed on to his next customers. Not so quietly, however, was the worthy man's rent gathered in this quarter.

“ I suppose ye'll no be wanting anything in this line,” said he to the muffled up guardsman, who, however, less provided for than the Blacksmith had thought, put out his hand towards the box, but that hand was instantly seized by Circumspect, who said to him in a low voice—

“ Stay, stay, my dear Lord, I thought, in the hurry of the moment, and the agitation of

your mind, you might have forgotten this trifle, and so I thought it best to bring it myself;" feeling in her reticule for some minutes, she produced her purse, and from her purse extracted the mystic emblem of eternity. This she gave to his Lordship—she then drew forth five guineas for the Blacksmith, and put that into his hand. The Blacksmith looked at the gold for a moment in the dusky light, and tossing it up in the hollow of his hand, so that it rattled rather loudly, said, in a dry self-satisfied manner—

“Ten guineas more, my leddy, if you please.”

“Ten guineas more!” repeated my Aunt Circumspect, “why the others only paid you five.”

“Yes, my leddy,” returned the conscientious disposer of conjugal rights, “that’s very true, but you’ve got a Lord under that hairy cap, and we could not find it in our conscience to tie up a Lord under a

penny less than fifteen pounds. It should be guineas by rights, but we'll let thee off for pounds."

"Oh! I declare this is quite a shame!" said my Aunt, a favourite expression of the chaste Circumspect, and which, on this occasion, was scarcely uttered when it drew the attention of Sir Simper, who thought he recognised that voice, and whispered to his lady love—

"Did you hear that, my dear?—Lord somebody in the grenadier's cap! Though I declare I don't know him," as if it was quite impossible that any one could belong to the peerage, and his person not known by Sir Simper Wily. "I wonder who the deuce it can be? this hole is so confoundedly dark, I can scarcely see the tip of my nose, though I could almost vow I have heard that lady's voice before somewhere, do you recognise it?" here the lady quietly pressed her true love's arm, as much as to say—

“Pray don’t talk,” and leaning her head on his shoulder, as if she were going to faint, Sir Simper began to fan her with his pocket-handkerchief with the tenderest solicitude, whispering as he did so —

“Poor dear, you will be better presently,” and so forth. In the meanwhile my Aunt Circumspect had been communing with her future Lord, demanding to know whether he thought the attempted imposition of the Blacksmith ought to meet with payment, and apparently his Lordship seemed inclined to make great distinction between my Aunt’s case and his own. For, as in his own case, it was quite notorious that Lord George Dunvext never paid any one, so now, in the case of my Aunt Circumspect, he appeared inclined to go the other side of the question, and pay every body; he therefore satisfied himself with the most prince-like nod of the head, which plainly said —

“The matter is quite beneath our consideration,” and seemed to throw the ques-

tion quite past him. Circumspect, taking the hint, troubled him no more, but holding a middle course between her notions of parsimony and his Lordship's carelessness in money matters, she made one final effort, by saying to the Diocesan—

“Methinks, Sir, you ought to marry us the same as you do common people, for the more rank you have coming to you the more your custom will be increased—you ought to marry us, Sir, for the same as you do the rest.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

“The ceremony that begins with *dearly beloved*,” and ends in “amazement.”

WHEN the blacksmith heard my Aunt's question, he paused gravely, and then replied :—

“Eh! my leddy, I'll no deny that I might weld ye thegither for a time, its very possible; but it would never be a marriage that would do you or me any credit, the joint would never last. Them Lords and such folk,” whimsically added the Blacksmith, “have a deal more wear and tear in their marriages than honest people.”

“Oh, good gracious! well, I declare, this is a regular imposition—must I pay it, my Lord?”

But his Lordship seemed wholly disinclined to come to his bride's rescue, and answering something which the bystanders could not catch, Aunt Circumspect, in reply, said, "Oh! certainly, if you think so;" then turning round with the most magnanimous air, towards the Blacksmith, she extracted, with a very audible sigh, much as she strove to suppress it, the required additional sum from her reticule, and put it into the extortioner's hand, saying as she did so, "There, Sir, there is the money; we aristocracy never have any words about these dirty matters; if I must, I must—but remember, Sir, this is the last time you shall have any of my custom at your shop."

"So I should say, my leddy, from your age," quietly replied the Blacksmith, wondrously less horrified at her threat than she evidently expected he would, and, doubtless, ought to have been; while my Aunt Circumspect, fuming at the taunt contained in those two words, "her age," seemed

scarcely able to restrain her temper, or to preserve her incognito. Nor was it till the enslaver of her heart passed his arm round her waist, that she consented to forego her wrath, and let the caitiff vulcanian priest move on to Sir Simper. As the excellent Baronet's turn approached, he was observed, like his chaste and-prudent sister, to commence a most industrious search for the required annulet, first, diving his hands into one pocket, then into another, and so on into a third, grumbling all the time.

“ I'm sure I can't have lost it, I had it here only a few minutes ago. Which pocket did I put it in? Let me see—ah! here it is—no, wait a minute, this is it—no it isn't—where can it have got to?”

“ Aweel, auld Joe! what hast thee lost the fether, mon, or left your gyve behind thee? I know thee could'st not have come away without thinking of it altogether—for by this means we aye tell an old bird from

a cock of the season. The young ones are too busy minding their leddies, to think of their rings; but the auld hands aye think of the gold first, and the leddy afterwards. Eh, mon! we can't stay waiting here all day lang for an auld worn-out ring!"

"What do you mean, fellow?" said Sir Sir Simper, somewhat angered; "Worn out! I tell you it was a more substantial one than any you have got there; and was simply dear to me from old associations—it married my great grandfather. I knew it could not be lost;" and, extracting the ring from an inside pocket, he fitted it on to the finger of his beloved, and finding that it answered very well, drew his five guinea fee from his pocket, and gave that to the *genius loci*. While, however, he was debating with the Blacksmith, my Aunt Circumspect pricked up her ears, and first said, as if to herself—

"Gracious goodness! where have I heard that voice before? My Lord, my Lord,"

she continued, giving a nudge to her grenadier, “ doesn’t it strike you that you have heard that voice somewhere before ?” But whether from motives of his own, or otherwise, my dear Lord contented himself with simply murmuring—

“ No :” and whether this induced Circumspect to believe that she might be mistaken we know not ; but she did not again repeat the question.

Sir Simper’s was the last of the four couples ; and all being now provided with that which Byron has so irreverently termed “ the sting of matrimony,” nothing apparently remained but to commence its honey—and once more shoving, poking, and pushing all the various actors into their proper places, the high priest of Gretna prepared to address himself to the serious task of linking them for ever together.

It is unnecessary here to remark, that the Rubric of Gretna Green, is one marvelously simple in its formulæ ; and when the

officiating elder found that all his clients had been duly drained of their last fees, he proceeded with the final ceremony necessary, by directing each gentleman to take the hand of the lady, and to say aloud—"This is my wedded wife," placing, at the same time, the ring upon her finger. This done, the lady said, or rather muttered "This is my lawful husband," which being heard by the blacksmith, he declared them "*firmly* united, and all sorts of refreshment ready in the next room." No sooner was this said, than the agitation, the gloom, and the evident suspense of the whole party was at once terminated, and almost as if some naughty person had been listening for the conclusion of the ceremony; a large door, at the other end of the chamber, was thrown open, and while a flood of light streamed in through the portal, a glimpse was thus obtained into the room beyond, where there appeared a large table, set out with the most abundant supply of eatables

of every description which might be termed either breakfast or supper, at the will of the party naming; since the cheerful board seemed to unite the claims of both those comfortable meals upon the affection of the gazers: while a voice proclaimed aloud—

“Refreshment is ready, ladies and gentlemen. Tea! coffee! wines! the soup is getting cold.” As these words were said, each gallant bridegroom seemed to throw aside the conventional formality of ordinary life, and not only clasped his bride in warm salute, but appeared to enter, as it were, hand and heart into the same boat with all the rest, and in this feeling, considering concealment, no longer necessary; all hands began to take off, not only their own masks, but those of the dear brides. First and foremost among these was Sir Simper, who, on withdrawing his wife’s vizard, uttered a cry of mingled pain, and wonder, surprise, and rage, that quickly drew around him every bystander.

“What! what!” he exclaimed, “what do I behold?” but it was quite evident what he beheld, for, instead of having wedded himself, as he fondly imagined to his ward Acantha, there stood beside him, looking to the ground with pretended bashfulness, and, at the same time, beating the devil’s tattoo with a very pretty little foot, and a vast deal of bashfulness, his old flame and flirt, the late Lady Sidney Dunvext; whose wit and delightful society, he had found so very agreeable, although these had never been sufficiently delightful to prompt him to go the length of a certain irrevocable question.

“Why, Madam, said Sir Simper, as this first intelligence of his grand mistake now broke upon him. “Can it be possible that you are Lady Sidney Dunvext?”

“Lady Sidney Wily, if you please, Sir Simper,” said the fair widow, correcting her newliege lord in the prettiest way imaginable,

“No, no, no,” exclaimed he, ‘nothing

of the sort ; I vow, I protest, I never will submit to such a thing ! I have been deceived ! I have been taken in !—this is a most illegal marriage—I have been most entirely deceived !”

“ Why, Sir Simper, I thought no woman could take you in ?” said a soft, round, joyous voice at his elbow. With a countenance expressing all sorts of fury, he turned at the words, and there beside him stood the very bride that he had missed, the blooming but malicious and exulting Acantha : “ Our sex are no match, I believe, for a person of your genius, Sir Simper !”

CHAPTER XXVI.

“ Now you have wealth at your own will,
And law at your own lust.”

JOHN HARRINGTON.

“ This is infamous—this is atrocious ! I have been greatly taken in ! ” with flaming eyes and pallid countenance, the Indian continued to urge, and indeed he hardly seemed able to find utterance for any other form of words ; for, what with his rage, and what with his astonishment, he was quite as speechless as an eloquent gentleman could wish to be. At this moment, to complete the confusion that reigned in the apartment—though, in truth, such a completion was wholly unnecessary—another of the brides, who had just been securely bound in the wedlock of the place, presented herself,

most wickedly, before the venerable Circumspect and saying, with a low bow :—

“ Madam, we hope the Aristocracy feels quite well,” discovered to the piercing gaze of the enraged Aunt, the beautiful, but laughing features of the fair Florence, while at her side—oh, dire and dreadful consummation—there stood the object of all her affections—the real—the true, the veritable, but deceitful Lord George! Already, my Aunt felt that this hour certainly must be her last ; but no one spares the fallen, so now, Acantha came simpering up to her side, and in the most unfriendly manner enquired—

“ Don’t you think, my dear Madam, fifteen guineas is rather too dear for marrying a Lord?” My Aunt looked for a moment steadfastly at the face of the real Simon Pure, and when convinced, that at any rate, she saw one Lord George whom she had *not* married standing beside her, she turned round for the other Lord George,

whom she fondly thought she had wedded ; there he yet stood at her side, muffled up in that charming military cap and cloak, that had so cruelly injured her sharp intellect, and rendered vain all her long years of anxieties on the score of fortune hunters'—evidently not daring to disclose who he might be. Mute from passion, she now motioned him to unmask, and towards this end, he certainly made some slight movement, but it was a very slight one. So slight, indeed, that its tardiness and suspicious nature, roused my Aunt's anger to the last pitch of wrath ; and stretching forward her powerful and imperious arm, with one hand, she tore away the cloak from her spouse's neck, and with the other, dashed from his brows—what in classic language would have been termed his plumed casque, but which I, as an historian, am bound to declare, was only his grenadier's cap. 'Ah, who in that dark moment shall paint her wild despair?—when in the person of

her spouse—the enviable possessor of that hand for which so many country squires, and elegant younger brothers had proposed in vain, she beheld—how—how shall we record the fact—the features of her brother’s clerk, Fi Fa!

“ Oh! good gracious!” she exclaimed, with something so like a shriek, that every one involuntarily turned round; “ Oh! this is most shameful!” and Aunt Circumspect lifted her two hands in the excess of her agony, and actually stamped upon the ground with rage. Then shaking both her fists at the head of the real Lord George, she added,—“ Oh! the deceitful villain; to get my consent for Florence and myself to go to the ball, in order that he might carry me off in his fancy dress; and then, to think of his sending my brother’s clerk to play this scandalous trick upon me, in his stead! Oh, you deceitful exasperating villain! and to think, only the last thing before we got into the chaise, I spoke to you, close

under the orchestra ! I am sure it was you yourself, then ; and to think that in a few minutes, *hocus pocus*, you should get away and deceive me in this manner ! Oh, good gracious ! to think of my having travelled in the same chaise with my brother's clerk, and never found him out. Oh ! I never can survive it ! I never shall survive it ! 'Take me away, take me away ! Oh ! he has killed me ; take me to bed, and let me die. Call in the police ! Call in the police ! Here my aunt, thoroughly overcome by her fond emotions, staggered towards a chair, and throwing herself into that, appeared about to faint utterly away ; when Fi Fa, in the greatest consternation, and with every mark of repentant guilt, precipitated himself at her feet exclaiming—

“ Don't distress yourself my dear madam, don't distress yourself ! Forgive my wild enthusiasm ! ” and a great deal more quite as little to the purpose. In the meanwhile Sir Simper, with looks of the most hopeless

despair, had been turning his head gradually from one point of the room to the other, hardly knowing, in the midst of this hubbub, what really was the state of the case, though fully convinced that something very dreadful had occurred, and that he, especially, was particularly diddled. At last, when the cries of my Aunt Circumspect had a little subsided, he had sufficient comprehension to turn round and address himself to Lady Sidney, with a sort of preternatural calmness, saying—

“Pray, Madam, may I ask who you are?”

“Your most dutiful bride, Sir,” said Lady Sidney, bowing very low; “with whom,” she added, “but a few hours since, you thought fit to run away from a masked ball, in a domino.”

“A pretty masquerade fête I seem to have made of it,” replied Sir Simper, as if speaking to himself; and then turning to Acantha—

“ Pray, Madam, may I ask, who are you ?”

“ With all the pleasure in life,” answered Acantha ; “ my story is soon told. I was but lately your most dutiful ward, Acantha Cash ; I am now Mrs. Pierrepont, so let me have the pleasure of introducing you to my husband,”—bringing forward the gentleman on her arm, who, as the reader may suppose, was in soóth none other than our excellent friend, Pierrepont. To this, the only answer Sir Simper made was by a fearful groan.

“ How have I been grossly deceived !” said he, after a few seconds pause.

“ By yourself, Sir Simper,” replied Acantha, with the utmost nonchalance. “ If you had had your wits awake, and listened to what I really did say to you, instead of fancying that which you wished I would say to you, you never could have been deceived. You told me that you wanted a wife very much ; and how could I do any-

thing for you that was kinder than describing the dress of a lady, who I knew would do you the honour of having you? Impossible! I told you the lady in a pink domino would run away with you, if you wished it; and here she is at your side. I never told you it was *my* dress—that was a gratuitous assumption of your own, for which you alone, therefore, must be responsible.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

“ Is there no exorcist
Beguiles the truer office of mine eyes ?
Is't real, that I see ? ” —

SHAKSPEARE.

ON hearing this, Sir Simper looked at the bride that had been forced on him, for a few moments, and groaning loudly, he exclaimed—

“ Fate has for me no further arrow in her quiver ! ”

“ Don't be too sure of that,” tartly replied Acantha, “ it's a very fine sentence, and easily spoken ; but those who invoke Fate, breathe rather a fearful word from their lips.”

Those fables, or narratives we should rather say, with which Eastern hunters indulge

us, draw rather a somewhat lively picture of the tiger taken in the toils; and imagination finds no great difficulty in supplying a very lively representation of that furious and remorseless beast, driven to his lair by dog and hunter. The ferocious savageness and wild despair with which he then turns to bay the powerful and grasping savage of the jungle, that in all probability has never before found any antagonist even sufficiently powerful to resist its greedy attacks, far less to become its assailant. So, on the present occasion, we must invite our readers' fancy to create a somewhat similar picture of the plain, if they would wish to have any notion of the manner in which Sir Simper took on, when he found himself so completely snared, as we have here seen him to be. However foolishly men in high places may act, there is often, particularly in the third class of intellect, a sort of feeling of place, which makes them dissemble the real extent of their fury, from

a regard to position. Even at the last, they are unwilling to forfeit the entire respect of those around them ; and, consequently, make a final and desperate struggle to conceal, from the eyes of all observers, the entire depth of their wounds. But, though this internal strife is thus somewhat calmed, it is still sufficiently fearful ; and thus, amid all the tried bitterness of the present hour, when Sir Simper beheld, not only his own scheme lost to him for ever, but himself the hopeless prey of the schemes of others, he still struggled fiercely with himself to subdue, as far as possible, all outward show of the real agony he endured. True, he stamped and raved, and muttered fearful curses to himself. But what was this he felt within compared with the intenseness of his ire—he could have slaughtered one and all. Grinding his teeth with impotent fury, as Acantha uttered those words about defying Fate, and stamping fiercely on the ground, he turned away from her, to get out

of the reach of one annoyance ; and, in an instant, another not less severe awaited him, as his eye fell on the figure of his sister, our dearly beloved and prudent Aunt Circumspect.

“ What ! ” he exclaimed, “ another masquerader ? Who have we here ? ”

“ Your unhappy, ruined, and betrayed Sister Circumspect,” replied the lady, rising at the words, lifting her hands aloft as she said them, and endeavouring, in the warmth of her sisterly regard, to throw herself on his bosom.

“ Don’t come Sister Circumspect over me ! ” cried he, furiously, casting the unhappy woman off. “ Circumfiddlestick - I say, you old fool — Gretna Green, at your time of life ! I should have thought of ” —

“ Being seen here yourself, Sir Simper,” interrupted Circumspect. “ You had better add, at my time of life, indeed ! Truly, you strangely forget yourself, Sir Simper.

My time of life ! Why, how much younger are you, I should like to know ? I can tell you though—and, if I may judge from your present company, you won't be particularly obliged to me for the information. But I would have you to know, Sir Simper, a lady of fortune and condition is not to be publicly treated in this way with impunity, especially by a brother, who is only eleven months her junior. 'Thank you, Sir Simper, truly, but that is rather too good ;' and my Aunt Circumspect looked round, as if for approval, to Acantha, quite certain that no one belonging to the sex could even hear of such audacity from a younger brother, without visiting it with their severest reprobation : “ as if eleven months were sufficient to make such a mighty difference between us. Is a young woman never to get married, I should like to know, Sir Simper, that you presume to lecture me in this way ? Is a young woman never to enter into the holy state, though, if all the

truths were told between us, I suspect you, Master Brother, have kept me out of it long enough already, after breaking off so many excellent matches ; it's all your fault that I am now trepanned by such a villain at last."

" And who have you been fool enough to throw your fortune on now—some penniless scamp of a Lord? Who is he, I should be glad to know?"

" A Lord!" echoed Circumspect, in the greatest possible scorning contempt, " do you call that thing a Lord?" pointing to the unfortunate Fi Fa, who stood trembling behind them like the compass card between the poles, scarcely knowing where to tender its allegiance. " A Lord, indeed! — it's your unprincipled scamp of a clerk, Sir Simper, that's who it is ; a pretty person you are to keep such villains about you, to betray unfortunate, unhappy women. It's Fi Fa, Sir, your clerk, that has brought me to this ruin and disgrace;" and here Aunt

Circumspect threw herself once more back in her chair, and, muffling her face in that last resource of injured innocence, a cambric handkerchief, sobbed like a furnace-bellows, so powerful, so energetic, so long-drawn were the notes of woe with which she indulged the company. She was evidently an experienced hand in such matters; and, in all probability, knew right well the irritating effect of her grief upon her brother's mind, and determined to indulge him in it to the top of his bent. However, no sooner had she sounded the war tocsin, than it was instantly taken up by that angry spirit, her brother.

“My clerk!” repeated he, as if at first quite unable to comprehend that mighty fact; then muttering to himself, “thank fortune, there is some one responsible!” by which he meant, to vent his rage on, at any rate—he sprang forward with a single bound, his cane lifted high in air, directed full at the head of the unfortunate bridegroom,

Fi Fa. In an instant down went the handkerchief of Aunt Circumspect—away the chair was spurned from behind her—forward she rushed, with still more of the termagant than she had even yet displayed, though this was wholly unnecessary—and, placing her burly person between Sir Simper and his transgressing dependant, she roared, in a tone that startled even her brother, who had never seen the gentle hen come out in anything like such a character before—

“Stay, Sir! bad as he is, he is yet my husband, and of course, therefore, for the future, no one has a right to chastise him but myself.”

Throughout the whole absurd and ludicrous events of the morning, startling as they had been, not one seemed to work such a degree of amazement and marvel in the mind of Sir Simper, as this act of protection from his sister towards the man of whom, but an instant before, she was complaining so loudly, as having ruined and

betrayed her helpless innocence, and a great deal more. He stood looking at her for nearly ten minutes, mouth and eyes widely extended, and cane lifted up on high, then slowly retreating, his features gradually subsided into a quiet expression of contempt, still mixed with wonder, while he said gently, as if to himself—

“Why that woman is a greater fool than than even I took her to be.”

As he came to this conclusion, the justice of which who shall venture to impugn, his eye fell upon the person of Florence, whom, from the effect that followed, it was now quite clear he could not have recognised before. Staggering back several paces, he looked and looked, and looked again, until becoming at length certain that his eyes had not deceived him, he exclaimed—

“What! is it possible! Surely I am in error here at any rate. Florence, that never can be you!”

“Yes, Sir,” said Florence, smiling, “it

certainly is me—but for you, surely I must be in error here, at any rate—my dear step-father, that never can be you.” The most bitter and uncontrollably vindictive rage glared in Sir Simper’s eyes, as his step-daughter ventured on this cutting pleasantry, and holding his cane out towards her, in a somewhat menacing manner, he commenced in a tone of the most virtuous reproof—

“ Florence!”—but though, no doubt, Florence, could she have received the benefit of what was to follow, would have been cut to the very soul, it was so destined, that the anvil of her step-father’s speech should very prematurely receive the hammer from the eternal clack of my Aunt Circumspect, whose attention, attracted by the solemn tones of her brother, echoed the sweet word—

“ Florence!—what Florence here, and married?”—making at once towards her, with no friendly intent.

“Peace, woman!” roared Sir Simper, interposing his cane against her further advance; peace, I say, unless you would drive me mad.” Then mocking her tone and manner with the greatest nicety—“bad as Florence has behaved, remember she is still my step-daughter; and, of course, therefore, no one has a right to strike her but myself.” When, however, after this little amusement on the part of Sir Simper, he turned round, to renew his solemn adjuration to his step-daughter, whatever it might have been, he found that young lady’s arm placed within that of a very stalwart personage, of whom he had more than a slight recollection as having seen somewhere before, though, in the confusion of the moment, he could not exactly call to mind where. While, however, he was puzzling himself on this point, Florence, with a vast amount of mock humility, addressed him, saying,

“Although your eyes, my dear Sir Sim-

per, have not deceived you, and I really am here at Gretna Green, still, of course, it is only fair to suppose, that I can simply be here, in case my elders, to whom so much of my reverence is due, namely, Aunt Circumspect and yourself, should in any way require my dutiful assistance as bridesmaid, or"—but Sir Simper did not allow her to finish her speech, kind as it was.

CHAPTER XXVII.

“Thou hast made me giddy
With these ill-tidings.—
— Now, what says the world
To your proceedings? Do not seek to stuff
My head with more ill news, for it is full.”

KING JOHN.

“CHILD, are you married?” cried he, without abating one jot of that angry look and manner he had from the first assumed towards her —

“I am, Sir Simper,” she replied.

“To whom?” he demanded. Florence motioned forward with her arm her loving spouse, who advanced boldly forward at the intimation, and the young bride, looking on his handsome forehead with natural pride and delight, gave forth the whole of his titles to the inquiring ear of Sir Sim-

per,—“The Right Honourable Lord George Dunvext.”

“Much at your service, old boy,” added his Lordship, with that sort of half familiar, half polite carelessness, that formed so distinct a part of his character, and bowing slightly as he said so.

“You’ll find my service rather a hard service, my Lord,” replied Sir Simper, grinning in considerable rage, and absolutely so transported that if he did not go quite the length of shaking his cane at his Lordship’s head, he made a gesture not very far removed from it. “I say, my Lord,” he continued, “you’ll find my service rather a hard one, or rather the Chancellor’s will be, when, before you are many hours older, you get service of an attachment against you for contempt of Court; and when you find yourself in the Fleet, my Lord, you’ll begin to know what it is to run off with a minor and a ward in Chancery.”

“Why, as to that,” replied his Lordship, “when I find myself in the fleet, old gentleman, no doubt I shall be all at sea again. But, thanks to your legal knowledge and information, I believe I am quite clear of all shoals there. I ran not away with the ward, but the ward ran away with me, according to your own advice. Do you know your own handwriting?” And as Lord George asked this question, he pulled from his breast pocket a folded paper, and, opening it with great care, he held it up to the gaze of the other.

“How did you come by that document?” exclaimed Sir Simper, as he beheld the paper; “it’s a forgery, Sir; I never wrote anything of the sort; at least,” —Sir Simper added, as some distant recollection flashed across him, and there he stopped short, afraid of committing himself.

“Yes,” replied Lord George, enjoying his confusion amazingly. “I think, when

you recollect yourself for a minute or two, you'll remember that you did write a paper of this sort, and at no very great time since either. I think you'll remember presently that you gave it, moreover, to me, if you'll just trouble yourself to look at my remarkably good-looking phiz again, while I put on the knowing pair of moustaches with which, at that time, I temporarily consented to cloud a part of its expressive beauty ;” and as Lord George added these words, he drew forth a pair of moustaches, that fixed with a spring, and instantly adjusting them on once more, presented that which he rightly called his handsome phiz for the disconcerted Sir Simper's inspection. “There, I think I'm the man, am I not, whom you instructed to carry off the Chancellor's daughter ? only you didn't know me so well then as you do now. Ah ! that was a rare dance of yours after the Chancellor's daughter, was it not ? I promised you should be one of the first persons I informed, as soon

as I succeeded in my undertaking, and I think you, on your part, declared you would sit down and write the first letter of congratulation to his lordship on the event. Now then, is our time, my boy ; will you let me call for a pen and ink for you?" As Lord George tauntingly made this inquiry, Sir Simper, in order to avoid his new connexion's exulting gaze, looked away in another quarter, and there seemed little better pleased, for the first eye he encountered was that of Pierrepont.

"Good morning, Sir Simper," gaily said the happy bridegroom, "this is the first time I have had any opportunity of thanking you for undertaking for me the delicious task of refusing the pock-marked, crooked-backed, ill-tempered, Indian-educated"—

"A thousand fiends on the whole of you !" muttered Sir Simper, breaking suddenly away, "is there to be no end of the villainies of to-night ?" And, solacing himself by mumbling all sorts of curses, not

loud but deep, he thumped the end of his cane, in impotent wrath, upon the floor on which he stood, and strode away, in the bitterness of his grief, to the other end of the room, as if to consult what course he had best pursue ; while the others, allowing him to depart, warmly shook hands, upon the entire success that had crowned the daring plot of the evening.

While Acantha, Pierrepont, Lord George, and Florence, were wishing each other all possible sorts of happiness, Fi Fa, encouraged by the interest my Aunt Circumspect had shown on his behalf, was kneeling at her knees, endeavouring, in the best way he could, to obtain her peace and pardon. His progress towards this happy point we shall be able to watch presently ; in the meanwhile, how fared the principal victim ? what were his resolutions—what course remained for him yet to adopt ?

“ What shall I do ! ” muttered he, as he walked apart—“ hang myself ! ” he demand-

ed, in sweet self-communion, as the first desperate aspect of his disgrace and humiliation presented itself; then, as the prospect of the cord, to which he had sentenced so many, seemed anything but agreeable to himself — “No!” he added, with a vast deal of prudence and foresight, “it is never too late to do that. What shall I do—mas-
sacre them all, without respect to age or sex!” and here, no doubt, he was momentarily recurring to oriental jurisdictions; and then he added, in a low voice, “Oh, that I could dare! but it would be attended with bad consequences. What can I do—Oh! Simper Wily — Simper Wily! to think of your being thus, like a fool, taken in at last, and by a woman, and that woman a widow too—actually a widow! but widow and spinster, there wasn’t much to choose, for faith they were both in the plot—a regular conspiracy! After this, the devil himself is no match for the accursed sex, unless he is well backed up. Still the thing resolves itself into

the same question—What's to be done? Faith, I know nothing for it but giving in, and making the best of a bad bargain. I'll pretend to forgive them all; and, as for my wife, I think I know, ahem, a mode of walking her off the stage at leisure, that might defy even the Coroner himself. The she-devil! to play me such a trick, and I, like a fool, to think such a hyena was dying in love for me, as if a widow ever loved anything but a settlement. Well, come, at any rate I have escaped that!" and, in the midst of his distress, Sir Simper seemed to find, at least, what Shakspeare terms, "one drop of consolation." "Yes! yes! forgiveness is my cue!" he added to himself, as if quite satisfied he had found out the real artful dodge this time; and, as he came to that conclusion, advancing towards the group, whom he had left standing behind him—"Pray, Lady Sidney," and Sir Simper here endeavoured to conjure up something like the bland smile of yore—"Pray, Lady Sid-

ney, may I ask what could have been inducement sufficient to make you marry me, whether I would or nay?"

"Inducement!" cuttingly replied the lovely widow, who, sooth to say, was not half pleased at the anger Sir Simper had shown at finding himself her liege lord—"Inducement, Sir Simper! that which would have been inducement enough for anything not much worse than arsenic or prussic acid. Three executions in my house—would you have more?"

"What!" screamed Sir Simper, all his assumed smiles vanishing, and his former fury returning in full force, "are you in debt too, Madam?"

"No," said the unabashed damsel, "I am not, Sir Simper; but you are. I was in debt this morning, but you have just kindly relieved me."

The determined way in which this was said, seemed to convince the party to whom it was addressed, that his case was nearly

as hopeless as need be ; and, groaning aloud in the intensity of his anguish, he struck his stick once more upon the floor, and again sought the other end of the room. Suddenly, however, it occurred to him, that this allegation of the debt might be merely a piece of Lady Sidney's playful malice to torment him ; and, returning to her suddenly, with an assumption of the old wheedling tone of voice, he said—

“ Confess now, dear Lady Sidney, your assertion of being in debt was merely made to try me. Ah ! you can't be in debt to any extent worth speaking of, or I must have heard of it. Do confess now you are not in debt—now are you ? ”

“ Yes, my dear creature, over head and ears. It's quite a family complaint— isn't it, George ? ” turning to her excellent brother-in-law, than whom no one could more fully corroborate her on such an important particular.

“ A family complaint, dear,” replied his

Lordship, for a moment foregoing his *petit-soins* which he was offering to Florence, and, slapping Sir Simper familiarly on the shoulder—a thing which Sir Simper detested only one degree less than the small-pox, —“of course it is a family disease; any one who knows anything of the history of our noble house knows that; but make up your mind to it, old boy, it’s the only family disease we have among us. Some old families are eaten up with scurvy—others with consumption, but the only disease of the Dunvexts is the simple one of debt. Most men die in their beds—but the Dunvexts all die in difficulties.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

— “An angel is not evil;
I should have fear'd her, had she been a devil.”

LOVE'S LABOUR LOST.

“CONSOLATION for a saving man!” exclaimed Sir Simper, taking one more turn towards the bottom of the room. Then, once more, facing round towards his bride, he said, “and pray, ma'am, how much may you be in debt?”

“Oh, a mere trifle, after all!” replied Lady Sidney, “only about twelve thousand pounds!”

“Only twelve thousand pounds!! Oh! oh!” groaned Sir Simper, “why, it's the price of a noble estate—to a man of my views and feelings a perfect national debt!

Oh ! I certainly shall go raving mad—I'm a ruined man ! I see plainly nothing can save me from it—I am a man utterly ruined !" Then, once more advancing towards Lady Sidney, his whole frame quivering with the efforts to suppress his rage, he exclaimed—" Madam, you shall repent this conspiracy to the last hour of your life !"

" What ! you ungrateful monster !" said Lord George, thinking it was high time to put Sir Simper in the right place, and curb his foolish raging with a strong hand.—" What ! you ungrateful monster, are you not pleased with your marriage ?"

" Marriage ! my Lord, I had as soon have wedded"—

" Come, come, Sir, take care what you are about," interposed his Lordship, " and in the midst of your valour be discreet ! Remember, Sir, that though debt be a hereditary disease among the Dunvexts, they have this great redeeming quality to make amends for it ; namely, every mother's son

of them is a dead shot ; and, although you may be troubled with their infirmities, nothing is easier than to give you the benefit of their prevailing virtue. It strikes me, therefore, that, perhaps, it may be just as well to put up with a Dunvext for your wife, instead of having one for your widow. This is quite clear, that, as this lady's brother, I am bound to render her every kind of protection she may require. It's quite certain, on the other hand, that you have thought fit to pay her a great deal of what is commonly called marked attention, but you have not done that which is generally customary in such cases, namely, made the lady any delicate offer. Now, on the part of my sister, I am quite ready to square accounts with you. She shall at once admit the illegality of your present marriage, and declare you free, but remember that I, on the other hand, shall feel myself bound, as her brother, to call you to an immediate account for the very marked attention which,

to my own knowledge, and that of all your immediate neighbours, you have been paying for the last eighteen months to a lady wholly unprotected, save inasmuch as she is protected by me. There lies the choice before you, Sir—I wait your answer. By the way, I may as well add, that I should not be sorry if we could arrange matters here in an amicable manner, because, as there must evidently be a long arrear of accounts to settle between us, touching the fortune of Lady George Dunvext,” pointing to Florence, “it would, perhaps, be better for both of us if all the annoyance of a troublesome suit in equity could be avoided, by arranging matters between us in a friendly and amicable manner.

On the instant that Sir Simper heard his new relative talk thus learnedly, of a suit in equity, and hint at its possibility as a mere every day matter of course, his feelings underwent a great change. Though not over valorous, he had not been much alarm-

ed at that part of his Lordship's charming conversation, which assumed a hostile aspect ; but, the idea of an equity suit—in which he was to figure as defendant—the notion of a solicitor's heavy bill in the distance, with the various impertinences of a strict enquiry into every little matter relating to his late step-daughter's fortune ; this came close home to him, and he already felt a sort of cold ague fit, or in other words, was mightily inclined to treat his Lordship civilly, if such a thing were possible, an inclination greatly increased by Pierrepont presently coming round to the other side, and taking Sir Simper aside, while he whispered—

“ As I have had an equal hand in carrying into effect, Sir Simper, the details of our little stratagem against you to-night, allow me just to suggest, that the wisest course for you to take will be to say no more about the matter, but at once to adopt the fair bride fortune has given to you. To say

nothing about any other matter, consider how a man of your standing in the country will be laughed at, if by any striving against the fact, as it already exists, the real truth should get abroad. A magistrate, and of your station"—

"I feel all that; I feel all that," interrupted Sir Simper, forgetting in his distress all former complaint against Pierrepont, "but," he continued, in the most whimpering manner, "with all this load of debt, Sir, what am I to do?"

"Don't grieve about that, Sir," generously replied the man, whom he had tried his best to ruin and defraud of a splendid estate, and a most delightful wife, "don't grieve about the debts, Sir Simper; myself and my wife have just been consulting over that affair; and, on her behalf, with mine, we make you the following offer, if you agree to let this marriage be fresh solemnized, to spare you the ridicule of having

run away with a lady who is her own mistress. Acantha and myself agree to discharge all her debts up to the present time, and to settle on her a further sum of two thousand five hundred pounds, provided that you will make a further settlement at the same time of five thousand more." Noble and munificent as this proposal was, still the miser had the miserable bad taste not only to refrain from any expressions of gratitude, but even to conceal the delight he felt at getting thus well out of a formidable scrape, in which he had lately stood.

"Well, Mr. Pierrepont," at length said he, "as a particular favour, and to oblige you, I consent; but I must say, I consider myself very hardly used in this matter."

"No favour at all to me," strongly replied Pierrepont, indignant at this mean and characteristic conduct. "I disclaim, Sir, all notion of any favour from any such source, and if it comes to a question of ill usage, I will thank you to carry back your

recollection of the statements you were pleased to make to me of my hump-backed cousin." Unblushing as Sir Simper knew himself to be, he felt his cheeks colour at this allusion to the past; and when Pierre-point, who saw how closely home he had touched him, added, "as for obligation, Sir Simper, bear you this in mind, that though Lady Sidney is never to know that this seven thousand five hundred pounds came from any other party than her own brother, I shall always consider that the party who has been most obliged in this matter is yourself, though I know you too well to expect any thanks. And now, Sir, is it a bargain?"

"Well, well," said Sir Simper, flurriedly, "to save any more words in the matter, I am willing to say it is."

"Very well, Sir, than have I your authority to announce to our friends at the other end of the room, that this matter is settled to your satisfaction?"

“ You have, Mr. Pierrepont, you have !” said Sir Simper, “ and allow me to add, that, after this, I hope nothing will occur to interrupt our former friendship.” To this Pierrepont, however, made no answer, save that of a mute bow, and, hastening to the spot where the others still waited his interposition, he spoke as follows :—

“ Well, my dear Lord,” addressing himself to Lord George, “ to so experienced a hand as yourself, I need not say that the only satisfactory method of dealing with little matters like the present, is through the medium of a friend. And though, perhaps, I may have arrogated a little to myself, as one of the oldest friends you possess here, I have no doubt I shall receive your forgiveness for having ventured to tender my services, unsolicited, to adjust matters with Sir Simper.”

“ Don’t mention it, my dear fellow,” said Lord George, “ a few minutes more, and you were the very man into whose hands I

should have put the whole affair. Well, what says the worthy Indian?"

"Why, the worthy Indian desires, in my name, to say, not for any fear of relations, which he cannot for a moment, of course, apprehend; nor from any dislike to go into the accounts of his excellent step-daughter, which he cannot, of course, feel the slightest wish to delay, but simply from that affection which he entertains for the lady, and that innate love of justice—though it may be weakness—he, nevertheless, feels himself obliged to confess—" and here, at this mockery of Sir Simper's favourite cant, a universal smile went round the whole company present, "we say, from these motives alone Sir Simper feels himself bound, in honour, to tender his hand and fortune to our most esteemed friend, Lady Sidney, and only to regret that he had not before been so fortunate as to see, in their proper light, those attentions, of the real strength of which he was not fully aware, and which it seems he

has been led to pay to the lady whom, in our presence, he has just espoused. But though these are his feelings and intentions, still it is suggested by me, and admitted by Sir Simper, that these espousals by the worthy Blacksmith of Gretna, though perfectly suited to my Lord George and Florence, nor yet violently out of place with myself and Acantha, had better, nevertheless, remain untold, as far as relates to the case of Sir Simper and Lady Sidney ; and, therefore, due time having been given to the drawing up of the necessary settlements, it is agreed, unless Lady Sidney object, that their wedding shall be re-solemnized according to the fashion of the English Church, and in a more public manner."

" Bravo !" Sir Simper, " I congratulate you !" cried the frank-hearted Lord George, wholly unsuspecting that his new relative's feelings, sentiments, and actions, had had the benefit of counsel ; or, in other words, quite ignorant to what rhetoric his friend

had had recourse, and that it was his generosity of mind, as well as purse, that not only brought Sir Simper to an honourable line of conduct, but without prompting, had decked in honourable principles and kindly feeling those deeds of which he himself was the sole originator, and for which he paid the largest price."

CHAPTER XXIX.

“ Well, I will muse no further !—Master Fenton,
Heaven give you many, many happy days !—
Good husband, let us every one go home,
And laugh this sport o’er by a country fire ;
Sir John and all.”

MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

As soon as Pierrepont had come to the conclusion of his speech, and while yet the warm-hearted Lord George, in the midst of congratulating Sir Simper on his generosity, still held that knowing Indian’s hand within his own ; Sir Simper who had not in his whole composition as much enthusiasm as most men carry in every joint of their little fingers, be that quantity great or small, I say Sir Simper, at this very moment, held out his hand, and said, by way of rider, and in order to show how fully impressed he was with love of Lady Sidney and her matchless charms—

“ Remember, the whole of this is conditional upon your lending me your assistance to prove the illegality of my sister’s marriage with my clerk.”

“ Oh ! certainly !” exclaimed Pierrepont and Lord George in a breath, “ we never intended that for anything more than a mere joke.”

“ Very well, then,” said Sir Simper, “ in that case, I am ready to say agreed !” But this agreement, wonderful as it might be, seemed only to bring down upon the high contracting parties fresh discordance. At the word “ agreed,” our excellent Aunt Circumspect, who seemed hitherto to have taken little or no interest in the fact of whether her brother remained married or single thereby, perhaps, politely intimating to him the line of conduct he himself ought to adopt with respect to her ; we beg to say that, at this word, agreed, the hitherto dormant Circumspect rushed, with all the aroused energy attributed, of old, by Wal-

ter Scott, to the immortal Noirtidineant, and carrying, like that destructive knight, all sorts of defeat before her—

“ Agreed ! Sir Simper ! ” echoed she, in great indignation, “ be pleased to say agreed to your own matters, and don’t trouble yourself with mine ; for my part, I shall not agree to anything of the sort ! ”

“ What ! — you fool ! don’t you wish to annul your marriage with my clerk, Fi Fa ? ”

“ Why,” answered our Aunt Circumspect — though, it must be confessed, somewhat sheepishly, “ I don’t, for my part, see how you can annul the marriage. What’s past, is past ! and what’s done cannot very well, to my mind, be undone ! A pretty laughing-stock indeed you would make me throughout the country, if I were to go away from here, and tell all the world that I came on a fool’s errand — and then not to be married at last ! and so infamously as that vile Lord George has behaved to me ! still, as the young man is my husband, why,

after all this trouble and expense, I can't see the fun, Sir, of flinging so much money in the gutter ; and, moreover, as the young man is good-looking, it may not turn out so bad as I was just now afraid ; and, say what they will, at least, my money makes a gentleman of him ! Besides, you are always in such a hurry, Sir Simper, it may be all very well among you Indian nabobs—Hurry isn't at all the sort of thing a prudent young woman should indulge in ! For my part, I should like to have, at least, a week or a fortnight to consider over the matter—then, at the worst, if he does not turn out what he should be, we can but make the marriage illegal after all.”

Now, in saying this, I have no doubt, and I feel sure, that my readers cannot for a moment imagine that the chaste and prudent Circumspect, who had been all her life looking for an eligible opportunity—that is, a perfectly and unexceptionably eligible opportunity, which, we confess, did

not end quite as it ought to have done ; but simply very much in the manner that such long searches are apt to end, namely, a lame sort of make-shift at last. Still we say, we have not the slightest doubt, that this excellent woman meant not the least harm by the speech we have just recorded, but simply gave utterance to that wise spirit of forethought which Sir Simper had himself so often commended, while it had confined itself to the “airing” of his “flannel waistcoats,” and the guarding against his “taking cold on the stomach,” a thing of which chaste Circumspect had a most wholesome horror. Doubtless, then, this suggestion of hers, as to the fortnight’s trial, was to her mind something equally harmless. It was a pity that so excellent a woman should have been so greatly misinterpreted, for, on hearing the proposal, as it fell from her lips, the whole company present, except Sir Simper, burst into a violent shout of laughter, which continued

in successive peals for some minutes. Not thus, however, did Sir Simper receive her prudent suggestion. Whether it was that unlucky expression of his sister's money making a gentleman of his clerk, and thus, as it were, being expended in a manner that bade fair to take it away from him and his heirs for ever—or whether it was the innate impropriety of the speech that so disconcerted him, we know not ; but scarcely was the speech made, than that former wrath, which seemed in some measure to have been hushed to rest, broke forth again in all its former virulence.

“ Wait a fortnight ! Try the marriage for a fortnight before you call it illegal ! You abandoned old woman, I've done with you ! Go ! Never more shall you enter my door.”

“ Drat your door, Sir ! and drat you too !” cried the usually measured Circumspect, now becoming far too incensed to draw any nice distinction, “ to call me an abandoned old woman ! I—I, Sir Simper—I who

have been the only means you have possessed for years past, of having a respectable head to your house, whom the county families could come to call upon ! You—you wretched, desolate, miserable, friendless old widower ! I, an abandoned old woman ! I—I !” As with a true rail-road principle, Aunt Circumspect’s wrath only seemed to increase the more it was indulged, Pierrepont, who saw very little pleasure in listening to the recrimination of two people, who—as far as his affection for them was concerned, might, with the utmost welcome, if they chose, have wrung each other’s nose off, and used them as pelting missiles ; ventured once more to interfere—not for their sake, but his own—as mediator. Stepping between the enraged brother and sister, he now said ;—“ If you, excellent friends, will permit me to suggest one thing to both of you, which may possibly have escaped the attention of either, I may probably have the good for-

tune to turn your thoughts into a channel, in which, ultimately, all your views may coincide." In an instant the discord was hushed. "What I have begged to remark," said Pierrepont, "is simply this; — my friends and myself, expecting that we might possibly meet here at a later hour than would otherwise be agreeable, took the precaution of ordering suitable refreshment. Over the supper table, which is now waiting for us, I propose, then, that you both consider over this matter, with more deliberation and calmer thought, than may perhaps be quite feasible just now; and who knows—perhaps, the good spirit of wine, may suggest some course capable of removing all difficulties that now exist, to a hearty understanding between us; and now that not another word may be added, I myself will set the example, and lead the way;" and giving his arm to Acantha, Pierrepont wisely walked into the supper room, leaving the rest to follow. Out of very

shame, Sir Simper could not avoid leading forth Lady Sidney, Florence and Lord George followed ; and the still vexed Circumspect, hardly knowing whether to frown or smile, to laugh or cry, with *Pi Fa*, timidly offering his arm, brought up the rear. Once in the supper room, Pierrepont, who saw that he had no troops upon the field, and that he himself was to be blamed, as a general, if he afterwards suffered a defeat, exerted himself to the utmost to prevent any such disastrous catastrophe, nor did he exert himself in vain. His first manœuvre was to open a heavy fire of champagne corks, under cover of these he pushed forward some able bodies of *bons mots* ; and, at length, had the parties sufficiently under his command to propose, “ Our hopes and happiness speedy and soon ! ” — a sentiment that was not only unanimously drunk, but actually with three times three, notwithstanding its iteration.

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